



*I thought on my ways &c. Ps. 119. 59 v.*



*I thought on my ways &c. Ps. 119. 59 v.*

JOHN BROWN

*Thoughts well Employ'd;*  
1756  
O R, T H E,  
**D U T Y**  
O F  
Self-Observation,  
I N T H E  
Care and Regulation  
O F  
**L I F E,**  
According to the  
**ROYAL PATTERN.**

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*I thought upon my Ways, and turned my feet unto thy Testimonies, Psal. 119. 59.*

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By *E D M. A R W A K E R,*  
Rector of Drumglass in Ireland. &c.

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L O N D O N

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JOHN BROWN

1750

TO  
Her GRACE  
THE  
DUCHESS  
OF  
ORMOND.

*May it please your Grace,*

**I**N Circumstances which put Men  
beyond the possibility of return-  
ing Benefits, it is a Felicity that  
they are not as well deprived of  
means to testifie their Gratitude.

And were it my Happiness that the

A 3

Dedi-

## *The Epistle Dedicatory.*

Dedication of this Book could contribute to produce as kind an Effect for me, Your Grace would be intituled to it by a manifold Claim and Right : Since as I began my growth in a Seminary of Learning planted by the late Memorable Duke of *Ormond*, so I have continued it under the benign Influences of his Family, and the House of *Beaufort*, in Your Grace's Service ; and to the Advantages I have received from that, owe the All that I pretend to.

But, Madam, I could never hope that so mean a Present as this Treatise, should find Acceptance with Your Grace, as a Testimony of my profound Respect and Gratitude, did not your eminent Practice of the Duty which it recommends, give me the assurance that a Subject so agreeable to your Inclination, will pre-

## The Epistle Dedicatory.

prevail with you to excuse the weakness of my Performance, and that I am as happy as just, in my Application to your Patronage.

For, Madam, the refined Purity of your Life, which renders it the Subject of our Praise, as well as a Pattern for our imitation, confirms us, that your Thoughts have been successfully employ'd in the Care and Regulation of it; and that, because you want no Admonitions to remind you of a Business so pleasing and familiar, you will encourage those Endeavours that tend to make it as much the World's, as it is Your Grace's Practice.

By this Piety, as exalted as your Quality, you make as glorious a Figure in the Church as in the Court, and are equally the Blessing and the Ornament of those Illu-

## *The Epistle Dedicatory.*

strious Families from which you are derived, and to whicd you are united ; but Your Grace is withal so studious to avoid the Applause which you deserve , that unless I could as easily excuse my self to your Modesty and Humility, as those and your other Vertues would justifie me to the World , I must not attempt your Character , but pass in silence the Perfections which endear you to all who have the Happiness to know you, and make them as zealous to divulge your Excellencies, as Your Grace is to conceal them.

And though thus I seem unjust to Your Grace's Merit, I shall best consult my own interest, by this means ; since the most successful Measures I can take to obtain your Pardon , and Acceptance of this Address,

*The Epistle Dedicatory.*

Address, will be not to mention  
the extraordinary Qualifications  
that require it from,

M A D A M,

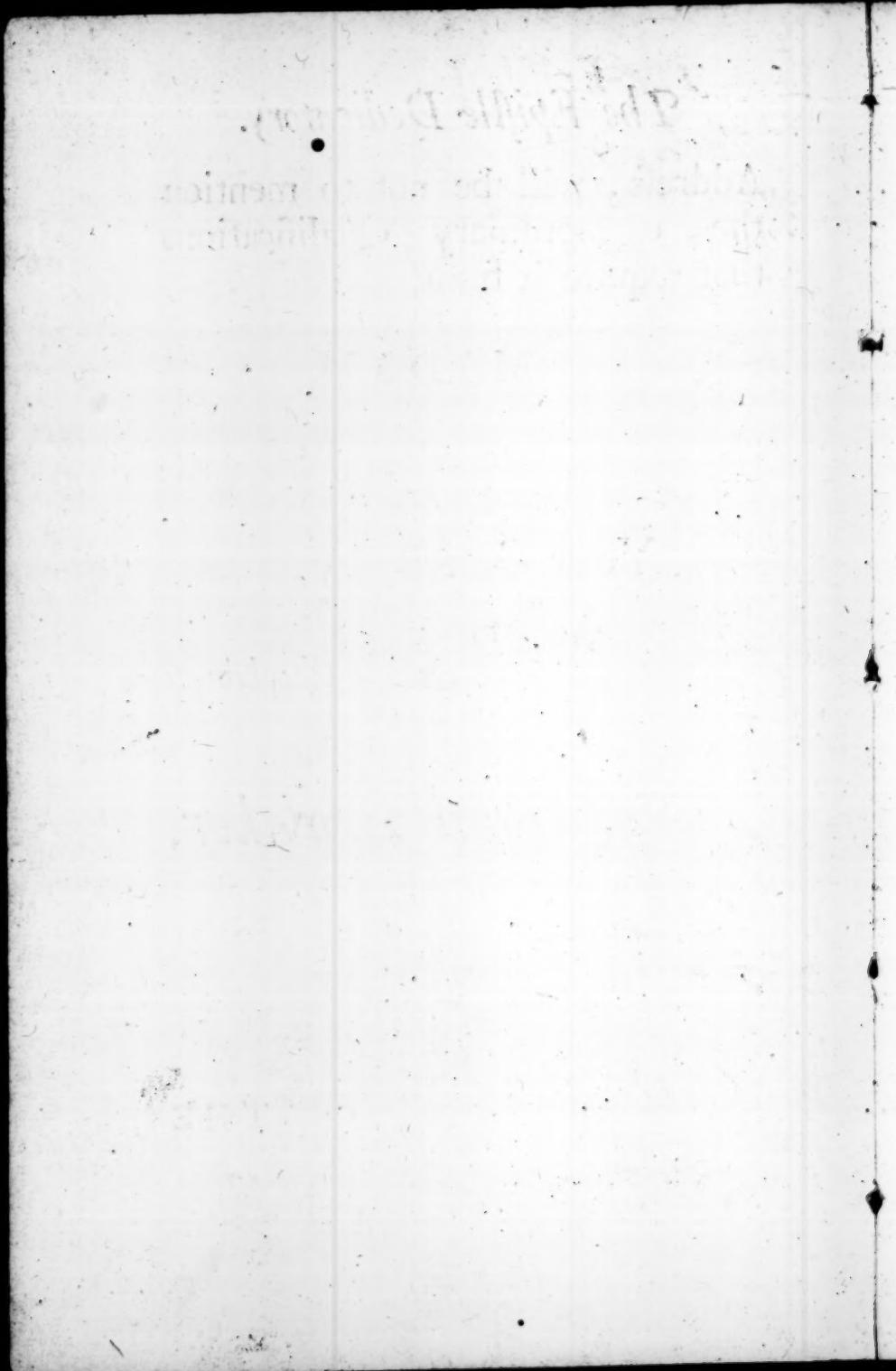
Your Grace's

*Most Dutiful Chaplain,*

*Edm. Arwaker.*

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T H E



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# THE CONTENTS.

THE *Introduction.*      Page 1

FIRST HEAD.

*What the Ways are which must employ our Thoughts, viz.*

*The Way of* {  
The Heart.  
The Tongue.  
The Actions.}  
16, 17

SECOND HEAD.

*What it is to think upon our Ways.*      19

THIRD HEAD.

*What we are to think on in our Ways, viz.*

1. *The quality of our Ways, whether good or evil.*      23

*This distinguish'd by four Characters, viz.*

1. *Opposing close as well as open sins.*      24

2. *Care to destroy sin in its very conception.*

27  
3. *Regard*

## The Contents.

3. *Regard to the manner of performing religious Duties, as well as to the matter of them.*

4. *Not acquiescing in any present attainments of Grace.* 33

*The second thing to be thought on in our ways is their Tendency, viz. whether we so run our Race, as that we shall obtain the Prize.* 37

*The third thing considerable in our ways is their Equality, viz.* 42

1. *How they suit with God's Dispensations to his Church and People.* 43

2. *How they agree with God's Ways and Dispensations towards our selves.* 48

3. *How correspondent our present course of life is with the primary Actings of Grace and Holiness in us.* 54

4. *How consistent our ways are with our hopes.* 59

*The fourth thing considered in our ways is their safety, viz. whether they are such in which we may acquiesce.* 66

## FOURTH HEAD.

*What are the most seasonable Times for the Exercise of our Thoughts in this Employment, viz.*

1. *When we fear some Judgment.* 72

2. *When*

## The Contents.

2. When we feel the Rod.	75
3. When we implore God's favour.	78
4. When others are inconsiderate.	83
5. At all times and seasons.	87

## FIFTH HEAD.

*What Motives and Inducements oblige us to think upon our ways, viz.*

1. Because God is a strict Observer of them	89
2. Because Satan is a curious Inquisitor into them.	94
3. Because wicked Men take notice of them.	103
4. Because we shall repent the neglect of this Duty, which will be insupportable.	107
When we think on the Happiness of those who performed it.	108
When we call to mind for what we forfeited our interest in Heaven.	110
When we consider that our lost Happiness can never be recovered.	113
When we find we shall live unpitied in our misery.	114
5. We must think upon our ways, because we may be deceived in a wrong Estimate. No Age excus'd from this Employment.	118
Not the young.	125
Not the old.	131
Obsta-	

## The Contents.

*Obstacles that divert our thoughts from this Employment, are*

1. *Unworthy constructions and improvements of God's Patience.* 137
2. *The difficulty and trouble we find in reforming our ways.* 140

*Two Considerations assist us towards this Work, viz.*

1. *The Enemies with whom we engage, cannot give us any long disturbance.* 143
2. *It is more advantageous and honourable to fight with Courage now, than to be condemned to everlasting Torments for Cowardise.* 144

## SIXTH HEAD.

*The result of this Employment of our thoughts must be the turning our feet unto God's Testimonies.* 146

*By which is meant,*

1. *Our examining and judging of our ways, by comparing them with God's Commandments.* 148
2. *Our amending them, by making them conformable to those Directions.* ibid.

*In this Turning consists the whole business of Repentance to Salvation.* 149

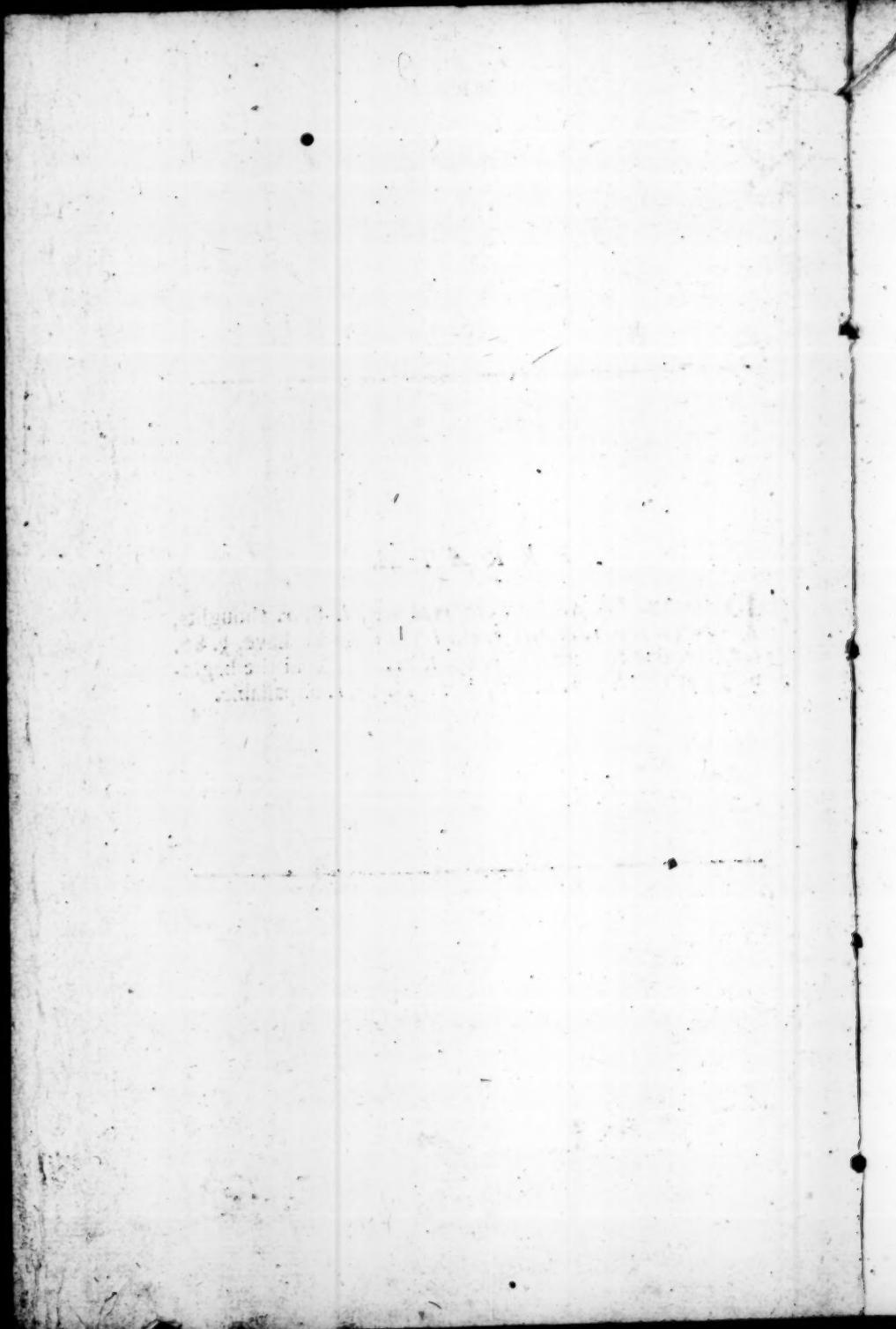
E R.

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### *E R R A T A.*

Page 17. lin. 4. *for* were *read* was, l. 8. r. thoughts,  
p. 32. l. 6. r. ardor, p. 48. l. 18. r. so we have, p. 86.  
l. 25. r. one to another, p. 89. l. 21. put V in the begin-  
ning. p. 96. l. 7. r. accuse, p. 113. l. 14. r. unpassable.

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*Thoughts well Employ'd:*  
OR, THE  
**DUTY**  
**SELF-Observation.**

*The Introduction.*

**A**S God, by creating Man *after his own Image*, did manifest, a design of exalting him to the participation of his Bliss; so he furnished him with means, and chalked him out a way, to arrive at the Sublime Enjoyment.

And left the Everlasting *Pleasures at God's right Hand*, should not prevail on Man to entertain his Appetite with its proper Object, and persuade him to em-

B ploy

2 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

ploy his time in the pursuit and acquisition of it ; What in itself was his Interest, became his Duty too by a Divine Sanction, and was enjoyned him under the severe penalty of Miseries to punish his disobedience, as great and lasting as the Joys that were to reward him for obeying.

But Man, though assur'd that his eternal Happiness, or Ruine in a future state, depends upon the *ordering his Conversation*, or as it is in the Original, *the disposing his Way aright*, in this present World, which alone can qualifie him for *seeing the Salvation of God* ; is yet, too often, so stupidly inconsiderate, and brutishly insensible, that he never makes any inquiry into his course of life, never takes his Ways into serious Consideration, or at best, very rarely thinks and reflects upon himself, what he does, and in what rode he travels, whether his feet are in the *Way of Life or Death*, or whether Heaven or Hell will be his Journey's end, and happiness or misery his Portion ; but goes on still without looking back upon his past life, or forward to that which is to come ; thus *he walks in darkness and knows not whither he goes*, and while like Solomon's Fool, his eyes, which should be *in his head*,

## The Duty of Self-Observation. 3

head, are employ'd in the ends of the Earth, he is a stranger at home, and unacquainted with himself.

This Inconsideration and Incogitancy occasion'd that assertion of the Psalmist, *Man that is in Honor and understandeth not, is like the Beasts that perish.* Ps. 49. 20. Nay it degrades him to a state below the level with Brutes, since *the Ox knows his owner, and the Ass his Master's Crib*, but the unthinking animal Man doth not consider.

Of this lethargick temper and condition, we have a lively representation in the Prodigal Son, St. Luke 15. He demands his Portion of his Father, not considering that it was in better hands, where it would be managed to most advantage, and that he could not trust it with a worse Steward than himself ; he leaves the ease and plenty of his Father's House, not foreseeing what different usage he shall find in a Stranger's Family ; he takes his journey into a far Countrey, not caring how he shall return ; and consumes his Substance in riotous living, regardless whence he shall receive supplies : Nay, he takes up at last with the sordid and despicable employment of feeding Swine, without observing how like his charge he was, or rather

4 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

more filthy and detestable. And had he been admitted to their Mess, and allow'd to fill himself with the *husks* that were thrown to them, he had perhaps continued in that wretched state, without hope, or design of altering his condition. But when Hunger pinched him, and no man offer'd to relieve him, and he could not among all those *Whorish Women*, who had reduced him to want a *Morsel of Bread*, find one to entertain him with that poor repast ; this brought him to himself, to reflect on his folly and his misery, to think how many hired Servants of his Father had *meat enough and to spare*, while he perished for want of necessary food, and yet was forced to a most Servile drudgery to earn what would not satisfie a moderate Appetite. This remembrance of his Father's House, begets in him a resolution to be no more a stranger to himself, or that ; but to arise and return thither ; to acknowledge his transgression, and beg his Father's pardon, and re-admission to his favour, and his family, though in the capacity only of a menial Servant.

This return met with success beyond his expectation, he no sooner came to himself, and within his Father's sight, but the indulgent Parent took compassion on him,

*The Duty of Self-Observation.* 5

him, fell on his neck and kissed him, called for the best Robe to cloath him, ordered a Ring to be put upon his finger, and shoes upon his feet, and kill'd the fatted Calf to entertain him, to rejoice and make merry for his recovery.

¶ And if we pitied his misery, we cannot but congratulate his good fortune, our grief to see him among the Swine, must be turned to joy to find him at his Father's Table. And then if a worse stupidity than his, has not invaded us, we shall learn to *go and do likewise*, to think upon our ways, inquire and look into our selves, that making a timely discovery of the errors and corruptions there, we may seriously address our selves to reform and cleanse them, by an early application of the most apposite remedies. For sure the great danger of neglecting this duty, of Self-reflection, and the as great benefit of putting it speedily into practice, will prevail on us not to dismiss it to *another opportunity*, but awake and rouze us from *the sleep of death*, if we would be turned from *darkness, into light*, from *the power of Satan, unto God*. If we would no longer continue in the impiety, nor incur the punishment, of close Hypocrisie, or unmasked prophaneness, but triumph in the Vertue and the Reward of

gullish

B 3

righte-

6 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,  
righteousness and true holiness; we must  
think upon our ways, and turn our feet unto  
God's Testimonies.

This is the Bethesda to which they, whose Souls are under Spiritual declensions, must come, to lift up the hands which hang down, to confirm the feeble knees, and to strengthen the things that are ready to dye; that shaking off their laziness or formality in holy duties, they may be quickned in righteousness, and recover their former vigour and activity, nay the benign light and influence of God's Spirit; which by alienating themselves from him, they had provok'd him to withdraw.

Thus by making straight paths for their feet, that which is lame shall be healed, and no more turned out of the way.

This was the course and method taken by the *Man after God's own heart*, as we have it from himself, *Ps. 119. 59.* I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto thy Testimonies. What the ways were that employ'd his thought and recollection, we may learn from his wish that they were made so direct, that he might keep God's Statutes, *ver. 5.* Meaning an exact adjustment of his life to the perfection of that Rule, from which he had never greatly swerved, but in his injurious dealing

## The Duty of Self-Observation. 7

dealing with Uriah; since the sacred Oracles have given him this Character, that *he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him, all the days of his life, save only in that matter*, 1 Kings 15. 5. which we find to be the chief Subject of his complaint, and the penitential acknowledgments of his frailty, with which the Psalter does abound.

He took no care to *make a Covenant with his Eyes*, or desire God to *turn them away from beholding Vanity*, but from the roof of his Pallace saw Bathsheba washing herself, and finding the Woman was *very beautiful to look upon*, feasted his sight with the unlawful object, not foreseeing what a penance it should undergo for that excursion.

Nor were his eyes more eager in looking, than his tongue in inquiring after Uriah's Wife, and he takes her to his House and Bed, without considering how injurious he was to God, his Neighbour, and himself, by his lascivious dalliance there, or that the Scene would soon be changed from that diversion, to *water it with his tears*.

And when the effect of his unchaste embraces was ready to discover the Adultery, he adds Murder, to prevent it, not consider-

8 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

ing how much of his ease and quiet he must Sacrifice to expiate the guilt, and still the crying of Uriah's bloud. But when *Nathan*, in a Parable, had brought him to a sense and abhorrence of the injustice and impiety of such doings, and to pass sentence on the Offender, and then inform'd him that he was the guilty Person, whom his own mouth had condemn'd to dye; then he began to make a sharp reflection on himself, and cry, *I have sinned against the Lord*; and then he receives this Absolution, *the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not dye*, 2 Sam. 12. 13.

But, alas! what would it have availed him to *think upon his ways*, unless that reflection had produced the happy result of *turning his feet unto God's Testimonies*? he might think upon them, and be never the farther from persisting in them; nay, he might think upon them so as to repeat in his thoughts the impiety of his actions, and feed his lustful fancy by chewing the Cud with pleasure; but it was not so he thought upon them, not slightly or superficially, not with complacency and satisfaction; but he thought upon the great wickedness, and the fatal destructive consequences of them; he thought upon them with sorrow and regret, with detestation and

*The Duty of Self-Observation.* 9

and abhorrence, and with resolutions of forsaking them, and taking better courses; and as soon as he conceives the thought, he puts it in execution, and turns his feet unto God's Testimonies.

Here then we have a pattern for our performing the great duty of Self-reflection, so absolutely necessary and so hugely advantagious, that without it, we cannot be approved in this World, or rewarded in the next.

And indeed such is the general corruption of our ways, so filthy and abominable are we become, in *vain* and extravagant thoughts, in light and *unseason'd* Speeches, and in sinful and wicked Actions, that the complaint may be as seasonable now, as ever, *there is none that doeth good, no not one.*

*Pſ. 14. 3.* So that unless we will run on in sin, to ruine and destruction, with the same irrational rage and confidence that makes the *horse rush into the battel*, we *must think upon our ways*, and *underſtand and ſeek after God*. That famous celebrated saying, *Know thy Self*, was not without reason ſaid by *Juvenal* to have come down from Heaven, and is worthily recommended to Mankind, to be deeply impreſt upon our Memories, and frequently revolved within our thoughts, For this intimacy

10 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*  
intimacy and familiarity at home, will not only shew us what is amiss and out of order with us, and lead us to reform and rectifie it ; but will prevent our future failings, and inlist us in the number of the *Wise*, who *fear and depart from Evil*; but without it we shall be assimilated to the *fool*, who *rages and is confident* ; who like *Balaam* not seeing the error of his ways, nor the drawn Sword pointed at his breast, presses forward to his ruine : Whereas did we take the *Wise* man's counsel, and *in every thing remember the end*, Eccles. 7. 36. we should not go astray.

This would not allow us to entertain such thoughts as would accuse us to our selves, and which afterwards we should strive in vain to banish; nor to utter inconsiderately any words, which we should endeavour to recal, but unsuccessfully ; nor to be guilty of such Actions, as we should too late begin to wish undone.

This reflection and care of themselves *Moses* wishes *Israel* would undertake, as an argument of their prudence, Deut. 32. 29. *O that they were wise, that they would think on these things, that they would consider their latter end!*

An unthinking Person is a term synonymous for a Fool, and such a one is by the  
Psalmt

Psalmit herded with the *beasts*, nor is he injured in the comparison, since he is transformed into their resemblance, while being honour'd by God, above other creatures, with the endowments of a rational and immortal Soul, he remains as insensible of these advantages, as if they were never granted him, or that he never had receiv'd the means of knowing them ; and like a Brute, is so intent on the present poor enjoyments, of this life, suited to his sensual Appetite, that he never looks forward to the unspeakable felicities of a better, design'd for the satisfaction of his more refined desires ; nor thinks in what a dangerous path he treads, but makes himself a slave to those Lusts and Passions which it is his Right to govern, and so flights the true and lasting Good, for the possession of counterfeit and transitory Pleasures, and is punish'd for his neglect, with endless sufferings and torments that are ineffable.

Now it's an unpardonable ignorance for a man to have acquainted himself with foreign Nations, and never take notice of his native Country ; to be curious to impertinence in prying into other mens lives and actions, and yet never make an inquiry into his own, which is of more importance

12 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

tance to him. This our Saviour resembles to spying a *Mote in another's Eye*, while the *Beam in our own* escapes our observation, St. Matt. 7. 3. and advises us to look at home, and clear our own sight first, before we attempt our brother's cure or reprobation. Now we should truly look into our selves, and think effectually on our ways, would we inspect our selves as nicely as we do our Brethren, if we would dismiss that partiality in our self-love, which shews us our own failings thro' the reverse of the Perspective, where they seem minute and distant; and look on them through that end, that brings them nearer to our view, and represents them in their just dimensions.

For while we are *lovers of our selves*, we are unfit to be judges of our actions, 'tis the difference in our affection that makes a difference in our Judgment, between our own ways and our Neighbours, and such diverse *Weights and diverse Measures* are an abomination to the Lord. But if we would as impartially judge our selves as we are apt to censure others, we should escape being judged by him.

It is one of the Choicest rules in the Golden Verses of Pythagoras, and has not the least contributed to gain them that Splendid

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## The Duty of Self-Observation. 13

did Epithet, That we should not give way to sleep, or close our Eyes to rest at night, before we examine our selves, and enter on a strict inquiry how we have liv'd the preceding day, what evil we have committed, what good we have left undone, and wherein we have performed our duty as we ought. For hence we shall receive these benefits, that as by the frequency of this practice, our judgments will become unbyassed, and we shall not partially overlook or extenuate our failings; so we shall find a sweet complacency in reflecting on our good deeds, for our encouragement to perseverance in well doing; and a remorse for our evil actions, to deter us from repeating them. As Job pleased himself with the declaration, that *the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the Widow's heart to sing for joy.*

Job 29. 13. Or as St. Paul exults and triumphs in the knowledge that he had fought a good fight, and finished his course, and that there was laid up for him a Crown,

2 Tim. 4. 7. While the Wicked lye down in their shame, and their confusion covers them because they have sinned, and not obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.

Jer. 3. 25. While, like Ephraim, they smite upon the thigh and are confounded because they

*sinners*

14 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

*they bear the reproach of their Youth.* Jer. 31. 19. And when we find the remembrance of our sins thus grievous unto us, and the burden of them thus intolerable, no privacy shall tempt us to a wickedness in hope of its concealment, since it cannot escape our own scrutiny, and we are the severest censurers of our ways ; which will make us blush as much to do evil, by our selves, as in the presence of the most grave, authoritative Person, and as scrupulous of sinning in our Closets and retirements, as in the places of greatest resort and concourse ; because we bear about us a strict observator of our actions, whose clamorous reprehensions we can neither silence, nor avoid ; which will not suffer us to make a wrong estimate of our selves, and *rejoyce to do evil*, through an opinion that all we do is well, because we do not consider and *think upon our ways* ; which is the reason that our hearts are in the *house of mirth*, when they should be in the *house of mourning*, and we go cheerfully on in our wickedness without saying *what have we done ?* and thus is our *strength devour'd, and we know not of it.*

But if we wou'd consider in our hearts, that God remembers all our wickedness, we would be more wary and *circumspect*, would

would think upon our ways and turn our feet unto his Testimonies. And for our better encouragement to employ our thoughts in this weighty business, and to this great advantage, we have a Royal Example given us, and it were to be wished we would be as ready to imitate this King in so good a Work, as we are to follow others, in things not so commendable.

And for our better help in going through this Employment, let us exercise our thoughts on the following Considerations.

First, *What the ways are on which we must employ our Thoughts.*

Secondly, *What it is to think upon our ways.*

Thirdly, *In what respect our thoughts must be employed: what we are to think on in our ways.*

Fourthly, *What is the most seasonable time for undertaking this Employment of thinking upon our Ways.*

Fifthly, *What are the motives and inducements, that oblige us to this duty;* and

Sixthly, *What must be the result of our performing it.*

I. *What*

16 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

I. *What the ways are that must Employ our Thoughts.*

The Holy Ghost doth frequently in Scripture veile our conversation upon earth under the Metaphor of a Way, to inform us that here we have *no abiding place*, but are only Strangers and *Sojourners* in this *Vale of Misery*, and during our continuance therein, are travelling the road to another country, in search of an *Eternal Rest*. This is the *way* which all flesh had so *corrupted upon earth*, that God repented he had made a Creature so rebellious as Man proved, and sent a deluge to destroy, what he once created with delight. This is the *Way of Man* upon which *God's Eyes* are still intent, and of which the Psalmist says, *thou compassest my path, and art acquainted with all my ways*: Psal. 139. 3. meaning his course of life and conversation, and that in the several particulars of it, his thoughts, words, and actions. For ver. 2. he says, *thou understandest my thoughts afar off*, and ver. 4. *there is not a word in my tongue but thou understandest it altogether*; and ver. 21. *thou knowest my down-sitting and my up-rising*.

So that by our ways is intended, *First*, the *Way* of the heart, our thoughts, purposes

poses and intentions, it being part of the corruption of Man's way, which occasion'd the flood, *that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually*, Gen. 6. 5. And this Holy David calls the way within, when he desires God to *search him and know his heart, to try him and know his thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in him.* Which teaches us that all our appetites and affections, all our desires and inclinations, are our ways, and the proper objects of our thought, which will find it no easie task to observe the multitude of *devices in our deceitful hearts.*

Then there is the way of the Tongue, to which the Psalmist said he would *take heed, to avoid offending with it*, Ps. 39. 1. So that our discourses, words and expressions are our ways too, and to be seriously thought on and remarked, that we may *keep our tongue from evil, and our lips that they speak no guile, since by our words we shall be justified or condemned.*

Thirdly, There is a way of the actions, as we find it in Job 34. 11. *the work of a man shall be render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.* For which reason we are exhorted to *make our ways and our doings good.* So that all our performances, deeds, and actions are our  
C ways,

18 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

ways, and fall equally under our care and thought ; if we would obtain the blessing promised to him that is *undefiled in the way.*

Now we find mention made of a two-fold way, *the way of the Righteous, and the way of the Ungodly*, Ps. 1. 6. and these, with respect to our thoughts, are called the perfect way, and the way that is not good. Thus *David* says, *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way*, Psal. 101. 2. which he explains immediately by adding, *I will walk with a perfect heart.* And in Psal. 36. 4. he tells us, *the wicked deviseth mischief upon his Bed*, which he calls *setting himself in a way that is not good.*

In reference to our Words, they are called the *way of Truth* and the *way of Lying*, the one of which *David* declares he hath made his choice, and desires to have the other removed from him, Ps. 119. 29, 30.

As they regard our Actions, they are called the way of peace, and the stubborn way. Thus in *Isaiah's* account of the evil doings of the Jews, that their works were works of *Iniquity*, and the act of violence was in their hands, that their feet did run to evil, and made haste to shed innocent blood ; he comes to this conclusion, *the way of peace have they not known.* Isa. 59. 8. And in the history of their Impieties under the

the Judges, it is said, *they ceased not from their evil doings, nor from their stubborn way,* Judg. 2. 19.

And now, being informed what is intended by our ways on which we are to employ our thoughts, let us proceed to consider,

*II. What it is to think upon our ways.*

This will occur to us from the several Scripture-Phrases that are expressive of this duty. Such as *considering our ways, Hag. 1. 5. Searching and trying them. Lam. 3. 4. cleansing them, Ps. 119. 9. taking heed to them, Ps. 39. 1. and in the Text, thinking on them.* The force of which expressions will appear from their general use and acceptation in the Sacred Writings. As in Job's affirmation, that *God knoweth vain men, he seeth wickedness also, and will consider it,* Job 11. 11. Which implys that God looks critically on the World, and imports more than a bare sight and knowledge, even a weighty and judicious observation. For too many live *without God in the World*, regardless whether their ways tend to life or death, and therefore inconsultly run into any way that is before them, especially if there is an appearance of pleasure or advantage in it. Nay though

20 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

they see the evil of their doings, and know the way they walk in is the high road to Destruction, and that *they who do such things are worthy of death*, yet are so far from having *their own wickedness correct them*, or their *back-slidings reprove them*, so far from thinking seriously on the hazard, nay the certain ruine of their Souls, that they not only *do the same, but have pleasure in those that do them*: Which argues them of the number of those fools who make it not their busines to consider, whose *ways are right in their own Eyes*, and therefore they go on and perish in them.

So that 'tis not a slight superficial knowledge, a transient cursory view of our conversation, but a laying it to heart, that is required; and accordingly the Command given by God to *Israel* to *consider their ways*, is in the original and all the readings and criticisms, apply your hearts and minds to them. So the Wiseman sends the Sluggard to be instructed by the Ant, *to consider her ways, and be wise*, Prov. 6. 6. and the question God put to Satan, *hast thou considered my Servant Job?* is in the Hebrew, *Hast thou laid him to thy heart?* and the word there used, is observed to be very comprehensive, including the mind, the understanding, Will and Affections, the

the study, counsel, motions, and the very strength of the heart. Which argues that this thinking on our ways is to be the busines of our Souls, that we must be intent upon it, and not satisfie our selves with a glimpse of our ways in the glass of our reflection, and immediately forget what the representation was, for then our goodness will be but as a *morning cloud, or early dew*; but we must *search and try them*, that is, make a strict scrutiny and judicious examination of them, as the words import. And when upon this inquiry, we find we have contracted any fullages or pollutions, then we must cleanse them from that filth, and *take heed to them*, that is, keep a continual watch over them, and be still upon our guard, that we be not surpriz'd by any new Temptation, or enticed after we have been *wash'd, to return to the mire again.*

And to this end we must *think on them*, call them often to remembrance that by reveiwing our past miscarriages, we may shun all occasions of them for the future; and if we take our selves in the act of Deviation, *wandering from the commandments*, that we presently *refrain our feet, and return into the right way*, and walk in it with greater diligence and Accuracy. The conclusion of all which is, that this employ-

22 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

ment of our thoughts, or thinking on our ways, is a judicious observation of our selves, which induces us seriously to weigh and intensely to regard our course of life; to ponder and meditate on our thoughts, words, and actions; to inspect them nicely; and with discerning apprehensions; since the *deceitfulness of the heart*, requires our utmost diligence and most penetrating judgment, in making a true discovery of it; and since the Tongue, though but a little member, is yet such an *unruly one*, that the taming it is a task not easily performed, and we are generally more eloquent in condemning its exorbitancies, than successful in reforming them. Lastly, since our actions are so light and petulant, that they oftentimes escape our greatest caution and advertency, and therefore had need of such a Guardian to restrain and check their numerous irregularities,

For this considerate thinking on our ways, separates and discriminates things that are confusedly huddled up together; it gathers and collects those that are scattered and dispersed; it traces and finds out truth; examines likelyhoods and appearances; and discovers and explores pretences that are feigned and varnished. This is it that preordains what is to be done,

done, revolves what is already acted, governs the Affections, restrains excess, and betters and improves our lives in all respects.

So that if we take the measure of this excellent Christian duty and employment of thinking on our ways, we shall easily perceive its vast extent, that it's an Act of the practical understanding, whereby it surveys and dwells upon its own intentions, and comparing them with the rule by which they are to be directed, lays a command on the Will and Affections to put them in execution.

Now from the knowledge of what it is to think upon our ways, let us pass on to enquire

*III. What it is that we are to think upon,  
and consider in them.*

And we shall find our thoughts are to be exercised about these four particulars.

First, *The Quality*  
Secondly, *The Tendency*  
Thirdly, *The Equality*  
Fourthly, *The Safety* } Of our Ways.

By the quality of our Ways is meant their being good or evil; we are to consider

24 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*  
der our Conversation, whether it's in Heaven or on Earth, whether our feet run the way of God's Commandments, or stand in the way of sinners. Now, *the way of the Just is the way of Uprightness*, says the Prophet, Isa. 26. 7. And if ours are such, we shall discern them to be so by four distinguishing Characters.

*First.* We shall vigorously oppose not only those sins that are more gross and heinous, more open and bare faced, and have such a loathsome deformity in themselves, that we are frightned by the ugly Visage from committing them; but we shall as heartily strive and labour against those which admit of extenuation, and are more close and latent, nay which with fair and specious appearances, allure us to be fond, and dote upon them.

Some Sins lie open and exposed to the view of all men with whom we are conversant in the World, others admit no witnesses, but God and our own hearts; those being committed in the face of the Sun, are made a publick subject of discourse; these, concealed within the privacy of a Closet, or some close retirement, or sever'd from the grossness of an external Act, escape the Observation, and the Censure of Mankind.

Job

New

Now a principle of Moral Prudence is sufficient to engage us against those of the former rank ; for either a tenderness of our Reputation, and a regard to that Credit and Esteem, which we have acquired, or at least aspire to in the World ; or if not that, yet a dread and apprehension of the cognizance and severity of the Laws, will restrain us from the guilt of Actual Theft, Adultery, or Murder, lest we come within the reach of the Sword of Justice, and betray our selves to such rigors as will add corporal punishment to reproach, and force the blood out of our backs, as well as bring it into our faces. But it is a noble and more exalted Principle which shall enable a man to sit in judgment on himself, severely to observe his own failings, remark and criticise upon his imperfections , and pass an impartial condemnatory Sentence upon the pride and haughtiness of his own heart, and the lewd dispositions of his Soul to vicious and unbecoming practices, which are liable to no scrutiny but that of his own Conscience and the all-seeing Eye of Heaven.

We know the Pharisee could boast, even at the Altar, and to God's very face, that his life was free from the notorious blots and scandals that stained the conversation

of

26 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

of other men, and made them black and infamous, and while he pleas'd himself with the thoughts of his being no *Extortioner*, or *Adulterer*, he overlooked the Pride and Arrogance that late enthron'd within his Soul ; and had swoln him to that excess of Vanity, and made him forget that he was endeavouring to recommend himself to Heaven, by the same methods by which the Angels lost its favour ; and that the more he exalted his own perfections, the more he should be abased ; and the nearer he justled up to the Altar, *God would behold him the farther off.*

But the true Candidate of Heaven, the Soul that desires to be espoused to its Saviour, will not take so much care, or be so solicitous for *garments of Needle-work and Embroidery*, as to appear to him *all glorious within* ; will be busier to cleanse and purifie the heart, than to *wash the hands and platter*, and no more indulge Spiritual, than carnal vices and corruptions. For such a one knows that though the one may make him more infamous among men, the other will render him as criminal and as hateful in the sight of God, *who does not see as Man sees, but tries the very heart and reins*, and through the Varnish of a painted Sepulchre, discerns the *rotteness within* ;

## The Duty of Self-Observation. 27

within ; and hates the Impostor that would abuse him with a specious outside only, and obtrude the Devil upon him in the resemblance of an Angel of light.

And for this reason it was, our Saviour told his Disciples that *their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, if they would not fall short of Heaven.

A Second evidence of the Righteousness of our ways will be our care to destroy sin, even in its very conception ; or if *lust hath already conceived*, to prevent as much as we can, its *bringing forth*. We shall think our selves disloyal and unjust to God, as well as injurious and cruel to our Souls, if we favour the growth, and do not oppose the increase of the greatest enemy to both. We shall not divide our service between *God and Mammon*, nor give up our selves to Heaven, like *Nazman*, with reserves. Nor shall we, like *Saul*, disobey his positive commands, under a pretence of Sacrificing to him, when indeed it is to our lusts.

Should Sin assume *Lot's* plea for *Zoar*, in its own excuse, and urge its littleness, we shall be ready to remember that the Majesty against whom it is committed is great, and so will its punishment be too ; that

28 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

that the cloud whose first appearance was no bigger than a *hand breadth*, before time had much encreased its age, was so enlarged, that it became a Vizard on the face of Heaven; And the Devil who tempted the Womau in the les terrible resemblance of a *Serpent*, proves a *Dragon* in the Revelation ready to *devour her off-spring*.

Nor need we have recourse to any thing, but our own reading and experience to inform us what consuming fires are kindled from little sparks, or how a whole *lump of dough is soured and tainted by a piece of Leaven*. And therefore we shall call with the Spouse to *take the little Foxes that spoil the Vines*, Cant. 2. 15. knowing how great the danger is of indulging petty sins; for a child received into a house may open the door to those that are adult in villany, as well as years, and while we are tender of giving a repulse to sin in its first address, we do not consider by what insensible approaches it may gain upon us, and engage us beyond the power of giving it a Divorce. Nor do we know when once our feet begin to slip, and we are going down the precipice, with what an impetuous motion we shall fall, and how unable we shall be to stop till we are at the bottom,

tom, and from a leisurely gradation in sin at first, be hurried on in time to *commit all impiety with greediness.*

When the man of God told *Hazaël* with tears what evil he would do to *Israel*, he replyed, *Is thy Servant a Dog that he should do this great thing?* and then abhorr'd the thought of what soon after he had no reluctance to act, *2 King. 8. 13.* And there have been many whose chaste ears would be grated with the sound of an immodest word, and yet afterwards have not only listned to, but took delight in such discourses, and fallen into a practice of debauchery, till they have vyed Lewdness with the most common Prostitute.

Now would such but think upon their ways, look a while into themselves and consider what an alteration they find there, they would be astonished to discover from what modest and virtuous beginnings they have arrived at such an extream of Impudence. Of this we have a deplorable Instance in King *David*, had he strenuously opposed this Sin in its infant weakness, when it betray'd it self only in a wanton glance on naked *Bathsheba*, he had not proceeded to defile *Uriah's* Bed, nor his own Soul, by an adulterous

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30 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

Act; he had not stained his hands, nor made his Conscience foul, with the guilt of blood; he had not entailed a Sword upon his family to succeeding generations; nor been the unhappy example to caution, and inform the world how far Sin will improve its conquests, and our yielding to Satan's first temptations, give him a power over us to *lead us captive at his will.*

If then we would preserve our liberty, and maintain our Innocence, we must keep us *far from an evil matter*, and shun not only the occasions, but the very *appearances of Evil*. But if we cannot keep at so desired a distance from sin, as to be exempt from a sense of its first motions in us, yet let us believe our selves obliged as well to dash in pieces the *Children of Edom* as to encounter with the mighty *Sons of Anack.*

A third Character of the Righteousness of our ways, will be, that when we are employed in holy Duties and the Service of Religion, we have not only regard to the matter of it, but the manner too, in which we should perform it. That we do not content our selves with the labour of our lips when we pray, and so honour God only with them, while our hearts are

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at

at a distance from him : but that we pray with all humility and devotion, considering our addresses are made to an Omnipotent Being, whose seat and residence *is in Heaven*, and who knows our thoughts as perfectly, as he sees our actions ; that we endeavour therefore to add faith and fervency to our prayers, that being raised upon those wings they may be able to ascend to the Throne of Grace ; that we pray as those who have a deep sense and feeling of the necessities with which we are press'd, and are weary of the burden under which we groan ; as those that know the inestimable worth of Souls, and value them in proportion to it ; that we put up strong cries and earnest supplications, as knowing that while we are in our journey to the spiritual land of promise, we have a Sea and a Wilderness to pass, thirst and hunger to endure, and enemies, and those Giants too, to conquer ; since *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against Principalities and Powers, against the Rulers of the darkness of this World, and against Spiritual Wickednesses in high places,* and therefore must not relye on our own strength and abilities, but should interest Heaven in the quarrel, which of our selves we are not able to maintain. Or  
when

32 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

when we come into the house of God, to hear his Sacred Oracles deliver'd, that we give our attention to them with affection and hearty Zeal, having our Souls exalted to meet the pleasing Embassie for which they thirst, with such ardor and allowable transports, as are fit for the reception of a message sent from heaven, and of the greatest importance to our selves; a message wherein we are invited to participate of the joys and glories of life Eternal, and called to the possession of *an inheritance with the Saints in light.*

And as in praying and hearing, so in all other duties of Religion, we must take care to worship God *in Spirit and in truth*; but if we only render the summ and number in our devotional performances, without endeavouring after sincerity of intention, heat and vigour, life and strength in their discharge, this is not worshipping God in truth, but mocking him with a false appearance. For externals in Religion, the labour of the lip and lungs, are all dead works, if separate from that holy frame and temper of mind which animates and enlivens them, and prayers though offered with *the tongue of Men and Angels*, are as insignificant as the noise of sounding Brass, or tinkling Cymbals, without

out the fervour of divine *Charity* to actuate and inspirit them.

The fourth Character of the righteousness of our ways will be our not acquiescing in any present attainments of Grace, or the heighth and measure we have already reached, but that *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before, we press forward towards the mark, for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.*

Men too frequently betray a canine insatiable appetite in the pursuit and acquisition of the things below, they are *Greedy Dogs that can never have enough*: nor is it strange, since the encrease of their enjoyments, serves but to render them more Ravenous. We find many, who, like the rich Fool in the Gospel, want stowage for their abundance; but few or none that even then think of *taking Rest*, but are as anxiously busie and solicitous as ever. Such is their impatience and eagerness to *add field to field*, and enlarge the bounds of their possessions, that no Geometry can measure the vast extent of their desires.

Were it possible to find a man so satiated with pleasures, so glutted with honours, as to own he had enough, the world,

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34 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

could not present us any thing so strange and rare, so worthy of our admiration ; But we find many of his temper, who thought the limits of the world too narrow for him, and wept that they did not allow him to extend his conquests farther : and it is not novel to hear others rail at Nature, and vainly spend their time in quarrelling with the shortness of it, as serving only to tantalize the Appetite with a view of pleasures not to be enjoyed ; to give them a *Pisgah* prospect of the Land flowing with Milk and honey, but to cut them off before they arrive to taste it.

And shall such empty vanities, calculated only for a day, like *Jonah's Gourd*, and which *perish in the using*, put our thoughts upon the tenters, and rack our desires with restless and unsatisfied longings, while we easily content our selves with the minutest portion of Grace, and never are at the trouble of endeavouring to encrease our stock ? Shall we think all the mean, ignoble methods of acquist neither too many, nor too difficult to procure some little wealth that does impoverish, or some petty honour that enslaves us ; and yet believe a lazy wish, a faint and languishing velleity, to be a prodigal expence,

expence, an unreasonable price for Heaven? *The path of the Just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day,* Prov. 4. 18. The good man is ever in progression, bettering himself, improving his Graces, and advancing daily towards the height and Meridian of Christianity, he gives diligence to add to his faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and so goes on from strength to strength, till he grows to a perfect man, and attains the measure of the Stature of the fulness of Christ. He cannot allow himself to be a Stationary in his Christian Race, and believes he is retrograde, if not in a progressive motion. But apply's Seneca's expression of Philosophy to Grace, and thinks there is no difference between intermission, and forsaking, since from the moment of its interruption, it will recur, like a Spring, to its first state.

We should be modest to impiety, to suffer others to outstrip us in this course, the very example of whose speed, should teach us to mend our pace, and follow in our own proceedings, the pattern we receive from theirs. And by so running, we shall obtain the Crown that is set before us.

36 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

But if we loiter by the way, we shall not reach the Goal, for our Christian Course is not limited, like the Sea, with bounds which it must not exceed, nor are there any fixed terms prescribed to the magnitude of the Spiritual, as to that of the Natural Man; because Spiritual Habits and Graces, if they do not encrease by exercise, will decrease and dwindle into nothing by desuetude and discontinuance.

And if we consider at what an incredible distance they are from Perfection, who have made the nearest approaches to it, we shall find room enough for the utmost of our endeavours, for the way is long, the journey is from Earth to Heaven, and besides other inconveniences, it is a narrow and rugged path, nor do we know how little time we have allotted us to go this Pilgrimage, and cannot think that we have leisure to mis-spend in standing idle, when we should be in greatest haste.

Neither do we know but that if we stay to look back to Sodom, when we should escape for our lives to Zoar, we may be arrested in the instant like her that did so, and not permitted to go farther. There is this advantage gained by aiming at the heighth and *ακμή* of perfection, that though

## *The Duty of Self-Observation.* 37

we fail of success in our attempt, and fall short of the lofty flights of Virtue and Religion ; yet by endeavouring to reach them, we shall soar to a pitch above the common Sphere of Men , and shall find a recompence for our labour, like him that dug his field in expectation of a treasure, who, though he mist of that, was inriched by the cultivation of his ground. Besides, we must consider, that though the meanest degrees of Grace want not their share of the divine approbation, yet they are only the more exalted measures that receive applause, and are crown'd with extraordinary Encomiums.

And this consideration should make us still dissatisfied with our present state of Grace, and that dissatisfaction should put us upon the search after more sublime perfections ; for if we once think we have enough, we shall cease from endeavouring after more, and, like the Reubenites, *take up our rest* on the wrong side of *Jordan*, short of the promised Land.

From the Quality of our Ways and the Characters by which we may discern it, we come to the second considerable,

Their Tendency, that is, whether we so run our Christian Race, as that we shall obtain the Prize , or instead of a

38 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,  
Crown ~~meet~~ ruin and destruction in the  
end.

This is a matter of no trivial consequence, but of weighty moment and importance, a matter that deserves our most serious thought and consideration, for without this we may be miserably mistaken in our course, and disappointed of our hope, since that *way may seem right to us, the end whereof is the way of Death*. Now that we may not be deceived, the Holy Ghost hath set before us *life and death, and good and evil*, he has chalked us out the direct road to happiness, and made it so plain and discernable, that unless we will, we cannot go astray. Nay we have him always telling us, *this is the Way*, and exhorting us to *walk in it*, and as he encourages us in our journey to keep the right way, and quickens our speed, by the glorious prospect at our journeys end, so he cautions us to avoid the Path that leads to Death, by a dismal representation of the misery to which it tends, assuring us that *the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*, and who they are, appears in that black list the Apostle gives us of them, *1 Cor. 6. 9. Fornicators, Adulterers, Idolaters, Thieves, Drunkards, Revilers, Covetous Persons, and Extravaganturers.*

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tortioners. These he tells us shall be excluded from *Heaven*, and that we may not mistake, or be abused in a business of this consequence, he ushers in his assertion with a cautionary admonition not to be *deceived*; of which we are in continual danger, both by the deceitfulness of sin it self in imposing on us, and of our own hearts too, in consenting to the cheat. For we are not so much fooled and put upon by the specious pretences and delusory appearances of sin, as by our own easiness and credulity; we would have it to be that pleasing agreeable thing which its fallacious insinuations render it, and therefore readily give credit to them. Nor could we be so soon betrayed, if we were not conspirators against our selves, the Tempter has no better instruments to prevail upon us than our own vicious inclinations, which he employs on that design, as he made use of the Woman that was taken from *Adam's* side, and finds them like her, too forward to assist him in his attempts to ruine us; for we become unfaithful to our selves, and by discovering, as *Sampson* did, wherein our strength consists, the Devil comes upon us, and having deprived us of the only defence we have against him, condemns us to a drudg-

40 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

ery worse than *Grinding* in the Philistine *Mills*. Nor is it likely we should avoid it, since though we so readily incline our ears to his suggestions, we stop them, and are as deaf, as the Psalmist's *Adder*, to the *voice of a better Charmer*: and though the positive Declarations of God's Holy Word have denounced heavy curses against the *workers of iniquity*, such as exclusion from the joys of Heaven, and not only so, but a perpetual condemnation to the miseries of Hell; though the *Oppressor* hears a dreadful *Woe* thundred against his injustice; though the Drunkard is assured that *death is in the pot*; though the Reviler is informed that *his religion is vain*, and that *sharp arrows of the Mighty, with coals of Juniper*, are what his Tongue deserves; though the Adulterer is told that he forfeits his claim to Heaven, and is of that unhappy company whom *God will judge*; and though we have sufficient warning given us, that these courses have a direct tendency to everlasting ruine, and will bring our Souls under the just wrath of an incensed and angry Judge, and the irrevocable sentence of damnation; and that whoever hath his feet in such paths, shall, without a quick and seasonable return, fall into so steep a Precipice, a pit so fatally deep, that he must never hope

hope to be delivered from it : yet notwithstanding this, we are so brutish and self-willed , to prefer our own conceptions, though never so wrong and false, before the Sacred Word of Truth it self , and to gratifie the lustings of our flesh, to the apparent hazard of our Souls. To prevent whose ruine, and make better provision for their safety, it would be prudence, in all our ways, to revolve often in our thoughts , something like the Inscription over the door of the Roman Senate-House, to make us as provident for our Souls, as that Assembly was for the Commonwealth, to see that they receive no damage.

And this we should not fail in regard of their greater excellency and worth above all other things that have relation to us, in respect of their original and duration.

Their descent was *from above*, from the Father of *Spirits and of Lights*, it was he breathed into us that *breath of life* without which our bodies are but insignificant lumps of earth, and have nothing to discriminate them from those of *Beasts that perish*; for they shall equally return to the dust from whence they deriv'd their beings, and lye undistinguished in their heaps of ruine.      But

42 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

But our Souls are subject to no such frailties, nothing can destroy their perpetuity, nor is any Republic so long-lived, much less our Bodies, or the more fading pleasures that indulge them, to the prejudice of our Souls; yet we are so nicely tender of those mortal parts, which must be captive to the grave, and a prey for corruption to devour, that we will not expose them to a gust of air that may impair their health, or hasten their dissolution: how much greater reason then have we to be rather apprehensive of what may endanger our more inestimable Souls, and to manifest a suitable caution for their safety, since he that neglects his body is only careless of a frail and perishing house, that is not worth his care, but he that is regardless of his Soul, is truly wanting to himself?

From the Tendency of our Ways, we come to the Third thing considerable in them to employ our thoughts, and that is their Equality, by which is meant, their consonancy and agreement with those things which ought to influence and direct them.

We are apt to call the *Way of the Lord unequal*, when the inequality is only in our own, and it seems so to us (as a stick held in a River appears crooked) not through

a defect in them, but in our judgment and apprehension. Now to make a right estimate, and pass a just censure on the Equality of our ways, we must consider them in four respects.

*First,* How they suit with God's dispensations to his Church and People.

The Church is *the body of Christ*, of which, if we have any part in him, we are all *fellow-members*, and should have *the same care one for another*, so as to sympathize in each others sufferings, and rejoice in each others honour. That our brethren may not upbraid us with our careless disregard to their circumstances, *that they have piped to us, and we have not danced*, and when they *mourned to us, we did not weep*.

It was a memorable generosity in *Uriah*, to refuse the necessary, as well as allowable conveniences of his house, the refreshments of food and sleep, while *the Ark, and Israel, and Judah abode in Tents*, and the *General and the Servants of the King*, were encamped in the open fields, exposed to all the injuries of the Weather, and harrassed with the fatigue and hardships of a Campaigne. *2 Sam. 11. 11.* And when good *Nehemiah* heard the tragical Narrative of *Jerusalem's desolation*, the afflictions of his Soul were visible in his

44 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

his face, and the King read in the sadness and solemnity of his Countenance, the legible characters of that grief that possessed his heart, and he justifies the Mourning in his Visage, by repeating the sad occasion, thinking no signs of grief could be condemned in him, when *the City, the place of his Father's Sepulchre lay waste, and the Gates thereof were consumed with fire.* Neh.

2. 2, 3.

When the *Elders of the daughters of Sion sat upon the ground*, who could blame the Prophet for making it matter of complaint? nor did they unreasonably affect that posture of sitting there, since the lofty Walls and stately Towers of *Sion* were levelled with it. Or was *Isaiah* in the wrong, when foretelling *the day of treading down in the Valley of Vision*, which he calls *the day of trouble and perplexity from the Lord God of Hosts*, he thinks no expressions of grief too pathetick to bewail the calamity, and that he had reason to weep bitterly, and forbid all attempts to asswage his sorrows, *because of the spoiling of the Daughter of his people.* Isa. 22. 4, 5.

If we look on *Israel* in Captivity, *by the Rivers of Babylon*, we shall find them weeping at the remembrance of *Sion*, and it was a becoming sorrow suited to their unhappy cir-

circumstances ; but how little ~~decorum~~ do they observe, and how unsuitable are their ways to God's in his dispensations to his Church and People, who *lye upon beds of Ivory, and stretch themselves upon their Couches* ; who *chant to the sound of the Viol, and invent themselves Instruments of Musick* ; that drink *Wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief Ointments*, but are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph. Amos 6. 4, 5, 6. Well do they deserve a *Woe*, who are thus *at ease in Sion*, while the Lord hath *cover'd it with a Cloud of his fierce Anger*. And are like *Ahasuerus* and his favourite *Haman* who late down to drink, while *the City Shushan was perplexed*. A blamable circumstance in their behaviour, and an unseasonable allowance of themselves in mirth and jollity , and unlike his temper, who is *afflicted in all the afflictions of his People*. Whose example Christians should imitate as persons of publick Spirits, and have so quick a sense of the calamities and sufferings of their brethren, as to be able to say with the Apostle, *who is afflicted, and I burn not ?* 2. Cor. 11. 29. It is not a season for men to seek great things for themselves, when God is laying waste, breaking down what he had built, and plucking up what he had planted. He who sits an idle

46 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

idle unconcerned spectator, when his neighbours house is on fire, may soon have occasion to employ his greatest industry to save his own, and therefore ought to give his best assistance to suppress the flame, before it comes near enough to do him any prejudice. And if we are insensible and have no stirrings of compassion for our Brethren in distress, this unbecoming disregard may provoke God to make us shakers in that misery for which we had no fence of pity, while it was foreign to us. We are told that *to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under Heaven*, Eccles. 3. 1. *a time to weep, and a time to laugh*; and sure the time to weep must be the time of adversity and tribulation, and he that *laughs in the house of mourning*, is guilty of rudeness and inhumanity, as well as of folly and inconsideration. What censure then do men deserve, who have no concern for the Schisms and breaches in the Church of Christ, and can look on its *divisions* without any *thoughts of heart*? who see War and desolation threatening to invade their Country, while homebred discords weaken and expose it, and yet *care for none of all these things*. But instead of endeavouring to compose the differences, foment and cherish them,

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instead of cementing the breaches, widen and enlarge them? Who while their brethren are jeopardizing their lives in the high places of the field, abide among the Sheep folds, to hear the bleating of the flocks! who feast on the days appointed for humiliation, and instead of imitating *Israel* in hanging up their Harps, call loudest for them, and entertain their ears with the voice of melody?

They must sure be putrid and corrupted members that have so little sense of what the body feels, and have no more relation to it than a Glass Eye or a Wooden Leg, nor serve half so much for use or ornament.

But though it is *nothing* to these men, what is done to God's Church and People, and they pass by as regardless of the affliction wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Sion in the day of his fierce anger, as the Priest and Levite did of the wounded Traveller; It is our duty not to forget Jerusalem, our Souls must cleave to the dust, when we find her honour laid in it, our tongues be dumb, and our right hands forget their cunning, if we pray not for the peace of Jerusalem, if we prefer it not above our chief joy.

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The second thing we are to think on in the Equality of our Ways, is their agreement with God's ways and dispensations towards our selves. Which are visible in his Mercies and his Judgments.

It was the Psalmist's inquiry *what he should render to the Lord for all his benefits*, Ps. 116. 12. and it should be our consideration, what returns we have made, how answerable to God's dealings with us, the mercies with which he hath imbraced us on every side, whether spiritual or temporal. If, as he hath bestowod his Talents liberally on us, we have made as large improvements of those plentiful receipts, and as we have been furnished with various, excellent, and continued means of Grace; so have happily grown, and made a successful progress in it, not neglecting the opportunities vouchsafed us.

Or if, as he hath set us up as so many living monuments of his mercies; so we have not been backward to celebrate and proclaim them, to declare what he hath *done for our Souls*: Again, If as we have been the subjects of many unexpected deliverances and as *Brands snatched out of the fire* of that calamity wherein others have been consumed; so we have made a due acknowledgment of praise and obedience:

ence : And lastly, if, as he hath *prosper'd the works of our hands upon us*, and *blessed our substance with encrease*, we have bin rich towards him, in works of Piety and Charity, *the Sacrifices with which he is pleased* : then our ways have been equal in their suitableness to his. Now if we search the Chronicles of our own History, we shall find all these benefits upon record, and surely when these favours and this goodness of God are there represented to us, we shall not pass them over, without inquiring, as *Ahasuerus* did upon hearing the account of *Mordecai's* good service, *What hath been done to him for this?* Esth. 6. 3. have we given him the honour due unto his name ? have we taken the Cup of Salvation and called upon it ? have we offered him the Sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay'd our vows unto him ? Such returns he looks for from us, and if we do not improve to advantage the Grace and goodness which his bounty hath richly dispensed to us, we frustrate his design, and disappoint his expectations, who requires a plentiful Harvest where he hath been a liberal Sower, and that we should put his Talents to the Exchangers, and return him his own with Usury, Mat. 25. 27.

50 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

When he had fenced his Vineyard and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest Vine, he looked that it should bring forth Grapes ; and when he found that it brought forth wild Grapes, was it not reasonable that he should take away the Hedge thereof, and let it be eaten up, and take away the Wall thereof, and let it be trodden down ! And when God hath set a hedge of protection and preservation about us ; when his hand hath been no way straitened towards us ; but his favours have been renewed upon us as constantly as the several moments of our lives have succeeded to each other : he waits for something from us that may answer his care and pains. But if we prove like the Fig-tree in his Vineyard, when he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none ; shall he not sentence us to be cut down from cumbering his ground ? What can we suppose to be the reason why we were brought out of darkness into his marvelous light, but that we should by an extraordinary splendor of our lives, enhance his glory who vouchsafed us that illumination ? By instituting us in the glorious liberty of the Sons of God, he intended we should be so far sensible of that freedom, and value it at so just a rate, as not to repeat the Captivity, and enslave

*The Duty of Self-Observation.* 51

slave our selves again to our own lusts, nor be anew entangled in that intolerable bondage.

But if in times of light and splendor under the Gospel, we live in darkness, and continue in the practice of such immoralities as would put a heathen to the blush; if we grope our way when *the Day-spring from on high hath visited us*; and stumble when it is made smooth and plain before us; we are guilty of a baseness which we censure and condemn in our fellow creatures, while we think our selves defrauded of the benefit which we might in justice have expected from them.

Thus if we have planted a tree in a fertile soil, where its roots may spread themselves abroad in the fattest earth, and have the vicinity of refreshing Streams to promote their growth; and notwithstanding these advantages, we find it does not bring forth fruit in its due season, and only cloaths its branches with useless leaves; we concludes it deserves the Axe for mocking our care and industry. Or if we meet with the leanness of *Pharaoh's Kine* upon those which we keep in our choicest Pastures, are we not vexed at the disappointment of our hopes, and ready to deafen every ear with our complaints? and what

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52 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

do we else, while we become thus querulous, but condemn our selves *out of our own mouths*? and indeed if we find the same unfruitful leanness in our selves, though seated in the same advantages, we should be very partial not to pass an equal censure on a cause no less deserving it.

And as Spiritual, so Temporal mercies require the grateful acknowledgment of our lives in obeying and praising the Author of them, because it is a return which he expects. When he expostulates with *David* by his Prophet, for despising the commandment of the Lord, and doing evil in his sight, he enumerates the great things which he had done for him, *the anointing him King over Israel, and delivering him out of the hand of Saul, the giving him his Masters House, and his Masters Wives into his bosom.* 2 Sam. 12. 7. 8. and he reminds him of his bounty not to upbraid him with it, but to make him sensible how that should have influenced his actions, and restrained him from offending a God, who had so obliged and loaded him with benefits. And we find it recorded for an aggravation of the Israelites base ingratitude, that when God delivered them out of *Egypt, and prepared a table for them in the Wilderness*, and fed them

## The Duty of Self-Observation. 53

them with a diet that was neither spare, nor mean, for he gave them meat enough, and filled them with the bread of Heaven ; yet they murmured while it was in their mouths, their desires were more to the flesh-pots of Egypt , than to the food of Angels, and they prefered the slavery of the Brick-Kilnes for the sake of the Leeks and Onions, before the freedom of God's Service with all its advantages and rewards.

By the inequality of *Israels* ways in this particular, we may take measure of our own, and perhaps we shall find our carriage as reproveable in circumstances of a near affinity with theirs, that though we have been freed from our grievances and oppressions under a *King that knew not Joseph*, and sit every man *under his own Vine, and under his own Fig-tree*, enjoying the Liberty and Property we admire, and have no leading into Captivity among us ; yet we do not cease from unjust complaining in our Streets, and slight the blessing of having the Lord for our God. We may justly fear that such neglects may provoke him to recall his mercies, of which we are not worthy, and pour his judgments, which we rather deserve, upon us. And if we

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54 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

should at any time feel the lashes of his Rod, which is proper for the backs of such inconsiderate fools, our punishment must work that wisdom and amendment in us, which our good usage could not effect. But if we turn not unto him that smiteth us, neither seek the Lord of Hosts, if he hath stricken us, but we have not grieved, if he hath consumed us, but we have refused to receive correction; but have made our faces harder than a Rock, and have refused to return; will it not be truly said of us that we are poor, that we are foolish, that we know not the way of the Lord, nor the Judgment of our God? But if we return to him, and repent of those impieties for which we were chastised, our ways will be equal and acceptable to him, and we shall receive this advantage by their being so, that as he hath torn us, he will heal us, as he hath smitten us, he will bind us up.

The third particular in which the Equality of our Ways is to be discerned, is the correspondence of our present course of life, with the primary actings of Grace and Holiness in us.

When first God brings Mens Souls out of Prison, and they find the Shackles of their Spiritual Bondage broken, and the fetters of that dismal Captivity newly fallen from their

their feet ; when they are *lifted out of the mire* in which they once *stuck fast*, and from an Egyptian darkness are brought into the light of *Goshen* ; and when the sense of this *loving kindness of the Lord* lies fresh upon their Souls, they are like the fountain of the Sun in *Jupiter Hammon's Temple*, at the first eruption of the morning light, warm with love and gratitude, but, like that, abate of their fervour, as the heat of the day encreases. These men *run well* at their first setting forth, and are eager to obtain the prize, but the esteem of it lessens by the way, and they grow faint and weary in the middle of the Race.

Now we must take heed that this be not our condition, we must *remember the days of old*, and if we find there was once a time when we could welcome all the sufferings which we endur'd for the sake of Christ, and counted them a new addition to our honours ; when we believed the *tryals of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of Bonds and Imprisonment*, the greatest illustrations of our Virtue, and proofs of our being such, *of whom the world was not worthy* ; a time when our hearts were ready to echo to every command from Heaven, and cry, *to I come to do thy will,*

56 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,  
*will, O God*: when our *love* was so refined  
and perfect, that it retained no mixture,  
no allay of *fear*; when no difficulties or  
dangers could make us start aside out of  
the way of righteousness, but we *took patiently* the spoiling of our goods, and all imagi-  
nable injuries and indignities for the sake  
of the Gospel, and were ready to part with  
our dearest pledges and enjoyments, to  
follow our Saviour to his Cross: And if  
we do not now perceive those holy fires  
still flaming in our breasts; if the love of  
Christ hath not still such a constraining  
power, that many waters cannot allay the  
ardor, much less quench the fire of our af-  
fection towards him; we shall have reason  
to conclude that we are fallen into the in-  
constancy of the Church of *Ephesus* and  
*have left our first love*, Rev. 2. 4.

But we are in no wise to allow our selves  
to be thus altered from our original perfecti-  
on, and instead of excelling the pattern we  
set our selves at first, fail in our imitation  
of it. And therefore we are to remember  
from whence we are fallen, and endeavour  
to retrieve our selves and regain our  
primeval Character by doing our first  
works.

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And to this end we must enquire by what means it comes to pass, that our Zeal cools, and our desires run in a lower channel; that our activity and strength in the exercises of holy living, is enfeebled and benumb'd, into a Spiritual lassitude and debility: How we have been bewitched to forsake the Truth, and divide our affections between God and Mammon; and why, having begun in the Spirit, we should go so far out of our way, to end in the Flesh, as if that could make us perfect. And when we have found the weight that hinders us to run as well as we did at first, let us lay it aside, and the sin that does so easily beset us, and run with patience the Race that is set before us.

We must think on the unreasonableness of our desisting from a work in which we have engaged upon such grounds and inducements as are still as strong and as encouraging as ever.

Why should we turn back since in our little progress in holiness, we have not met with any thing to raise a suspicion in us that we have mislook our way, or to make us repent of our former forwardness? Are not the Service of Jesus Christ, which is perfect freedom; the continual feast of a good Conscience; the dwelling under the defence

58 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

*fence of the most high, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty; as profitable and pleasant, as safe and desirable, as they have been represented to us? Is the Sample we have seen of the Clusters of Canaan, such as gives us occasion to despise the Land, or bring an ill report on that which is indeed so good?*

Let it not be said of us that we have changed our glory for that which doth not profit, or forsaken the Fountain of living Waters, and hewen out to our selves broken Cisterns. Have we seen no form or comeliness in our Saviour, during our small enjoyment of his presence? or could we perceive no beauty in him, that we should desire him as we have done heretofore? Why should we give him occasion to expostulate with us as he did once with *Israel*? *O my People, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee. Testifie against me.* Mic. 6. 3. and if we can put him in remembrance of his dealing so with us, when we plead together, it behoves us to declare it; *that we may be justified.* But he hath not pressed us to impossibilities; nor exacted our usual tale of Bricks without giving us proportionable allowances of Straw; he hath not oppressed our shoulders with heavy burdens, which he hath not enabled us to bear;

## *The Duty of Self-Observation.* 59

bear ; his *Commandments* have not been *grievous*, nor have the meanest of our Services met with disproportionate rewards ; But he has prevented our wishes, and done abundantly for us above what we were able to ask or think. And if we seriously consider this, we shall be ashamed to remit of our endeavours, or slacken our former diligence in the ways of Piety, but *gird up the loins of our minds*, and finish our course with the same alacrity, which we shewed in our beginning it.

And now we come to the fourth and last thing wherein we must think upon the Equality of our Ways, and that is how consistent they are with our Hopes.

And truly *our hope is even in God*, that when *our house of this earthly Tabernacle is dissolved*, we shall have a *building of God*, *a house not made with hands*, *eternal in the Heavens*.

That there we shall receive a *Crown of glory that fadeth not away*, and have an easie entrance into the joy of our Lord, that *fulness of joy* which is in his presence, and those *pleasures* which are at his right hand for evermore. These great, these inconcievable Blessings, such as *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor have entred into the heart of man*, are the object of which our ambition is directed :

60 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

rected: our aspiring thoughts, and towring hopes all aim at this perpetual felicity. And these, one would think, should have a sufficient prevalency to engage us in the right methods of arriving where we hope to be. The Apostle tells us *that every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things*, 1 Cor. 9. 25. Meaning thereby not only his continence, or abstinence from things hurtful, but a competent use of things necessary to encrease his strength, and those too obtained by a continual exercise. Now they of whom he speaks, took this pains to obtain *a corruptible Crown*, and shall not we be more indefatigable in our endeavours for one that is *incorruptible*? Here we have no *abiding place*, the little satisfaction which they, who make this world the centre of their happiness, find in it, argues that God never intended it for their repose. The *variety* of their desires meets with *vexation of Spirit* in all things, and they are still upon the inquiry, *who will show us any good?* though in all their search after what is substantially so, they meet with nothing but some shadows and faint resemblances of it, which are not only delusory phantasms, that cannot satisfie them, but malignant Spectres, that invite them to their ruin. So that all the discovery they  
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can make of happiness, is, that it is not to be found on earth.

Now the reason why we can find no real satisfaction, is because instead of striving for mastery over the Enemies of our Nature, we fight against our own Souls, and are as well the managers, as the seat of that war that is waged against our selves, not considering that God hath intended higher things for us, a Victory over, and not a Slavery to such Vanities, and rewards our Conquest not with a fading Chaplet made of leaves, but with an immarcessible *Crown of Glory*. This is the *Prize* for which we *strive*, the Goal to which we run, and the exercise of Grace must be both the Race and Path. There is no arriving at Happiness, but by such means, whose purity shews they are of the same nature with their end, as the light that directs us to see the Sun, is congenial with the Sun it self.

He that would find Heaven at his journeys end, must take the way that leads to it, must have *his conversation there*, and make Grace his road to Glory. But if we *embrace a dunghill*, who pretend to have been *brought up in Scarlet*; if we *walk in darkness*, who claim *an inheritance with the Saints in light*; the degeneracy of our actions

62 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

from our pretensions, will discoyer us to be Impostors, and we shall not be allow'd of for the *Sons of God*, and joint-heirs with Christ, because we neglect to do the works which alone can justify our relation to him.

St. John representing to us what we already are, and what we may expect to be, shews us also what an influence that hope ought to have over our conversation; that now we are the *Sons of God*, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is. And every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

The promises of happiness are made upon this condition, without holiness no man shall see God. He that would be translated to reign with him in Heaven, must like Enoch, walk with him on Earth. There will be no participation of his glory allowed to them who have not a resemblance of his purity. Nay the object of our hope, the felicity which consists in seeing and enjoying God, is lost to the impure. His Spiritual perfections cannot be discerned by them, the purity of his Essence is not liable to their apprehensions, he will seem to them no better than one of the Gods of the

the Heathens, whom they represented in their own figure and similitude, and rendered them subject to the passions and infirmities that were predominant in themselves.

For as it is impossible for men to raise their notions of any thing above what they understand; so wicked men have mean conceptions of God's holiness, because they make an estimate of it by their own, and therefore think him *such a one as themselves*. But could they be admitted to the beatifick Vision, and allowed a clearer sight than the dark enigmatical view they have at present, what pleasure, what enjoyment would they find in it? alas none: for a Spiritual object can be no way agreeable to a carnal faculty, nor can the contemplation of God's purity, be a happiness to those whose delight is in uncleanness.

Wherefore, as the promise of this reward is an incitement to the love of holiness, so the expectation of it can be satisfactory to none but those who are *pure in heart*. And for this reason God makes the perfection of holiness hereafter, the recompence of its initiation here. So that this will be a matter very well deserving the employment of our thoughts and serious

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64 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

reflection, whether we take the right way to obtain the accomplishment of our hope, and lay aside all those defilements and pollutions which may obstruct it. For this *cleansing our selves from all filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit*, is that perfecting holiness *in the fear of God*, which alone can entitle us to his great and precious promises: because *nothing that is unclean* can have admittance into his presence, nor shall any *impure thing continue in his sight*, for he is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity, and there is as little fellowship between Christ and Belial, as communication between light and darkness; the new Heaven wherein dwelleth righteousness, can be no proper habitation for the workers of iniquity. They therefore who look for such a Heaven, must be diligent that they may be found without spot and blameless, the only qualification for it.

2 Pet. 3. 4. It is our duty, if we would entertain a reasonable hope to partake of God's illustrious purity in Heaven, to make as near approaches to it as we can on Earth, by purging our selves from sin, and extirpating our vices and impurities, that so we may become *Vessels of Honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use*. Nor will it suffice us to be transformed into the resemblance of our Lord only in what relates

lates to his more exalted State, but we must be assimilated to him in his humiliation and abasement, upon all occasions for it. If we would receive a Crown of Glory from his hands, we must submit our heads to be crowned, like his, with thorns ; and not startle at his Cross when it is laid upon our shoulders , but bear the burden as chearfully for his sake, as he carried it for ours. We must *despise the shame* and ignominy of it, for the joy that is set before us, or else we must not hope to *sit down with him at the right hand of the Throne of God*. For if we refuse to endure the hardships to which his service sometimes exposes us, we have no pretence to its rewards: for the way to accompany him in his triumphs, is to follow him in his sufferings ; and when we have thus *born the Image of the Earthly*, we shall also bear the Image of the Heavenly. St. Paul tells us, that only when tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, that is the certain hope, which maketh not ashamed, Rom. 5. 3,4,5. for it is a well grounded hope, and shall not be disappointed: but what ever hope we entertain which is not the consequence of that Climax, which is not begot by those degrees, is the hope of Hypocrites, which shall perish.

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66 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

We come now to consider the Fourth thing to be thought on in our Ways, and that is, safety of them. By which is intended their being such in which we may acquiesce, and think our selves secure, and be willing to be found in them at that day when we must pass an examination of them.

We know that we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, to give an account of all things done in the Body, whether good or evil. Now doubtless it imports us to consider whether our ways are such as will endure this Test, whether we have supplyed our selves with Oyl, and trimmed our Lamps against the coming of the Bridegroom ; or like the foolish Virgins, in the Parable, lose the opportunity of going in with him into the Marriage-Chamber, while we are seeking in vain to buy ; and whether we have got on such a Wedding Garment , as will priviledge us to sit at the table with the other guests, or have neglected to provide one, and for that reason shall be excluded thence, and cast into outer darkness. St. Paul who had declared of himself that he was touching the righteousness which is in the Law blameless, Phil. 3. 6, yet desires to be found at the last day in Christ, not having his own righteousness which

*The Duty of Self-Observation.* 67

*which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ.* He was able to challenge the World, as our Saviour did, to *convince him of Sin* in the breach of the letter of the Law, and yet durst not rely on his own righteousness, to be found in it at the day of Accounts.

He knew that *God doth not see as Man seeth*, that men are too superficial in their expositions of the Law, and more in their obedience to it, and would overlook many failings and infirmities which could not escape the sight and sentence of that discerning God, *whose Eyes are on the Ways of Man*, and to whom, both his inward thoughts and heart, be they never so deep, are open. He knew that no man, how good, how innocent soever, could escape condemnation in that Judgment, if he should be called to a strict account for the most inoffensive day of his whole life, without the Merits and Righteousness of Jesus Christ to plead for and excuse him.

And if this great Apostle found in his very righteousness, in his whitest innocence, and most unerring state, something which he durst not stand to, what confidence shall weaker Christians have in their own performances? and *if the Righteous scarcely be saved, where then shall the*

68 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

*Ungodly and the Sinner appear ?* What shall become of them, who from their tender infancy have been employed in the drudgeries of Satan, and bending their course to Hell? whose unrepented sins shall at that day attend them in their crimson liveries, and be rendered heinous indeed by all the aggravating circumstances, whereby sin is capable of being made *exceeding sinful?* What then shall the Adulterer do, who durst not venture on his darling sin, without the favourable shelter of *the twylight*, or the kind concealment of a disguise; when his deeds of darkness shall be brought to light, and his nakedness made a *spectacle to Men and Angels?* If the *morning was to him as the shadow of death*, and a discovery bred strange confusion in him; then what guilty blushes shall overspread his face, what anxious apprehensions shall terrifie his Soul; when he sees his secret filthiness, which he took such care to hide, made publick, and Hell fire prepared as a suitable punishment for his burning lust? What then shall the prodigious Swearer do, who bids defiance to Heaven with horrid Oaths and Blasphemies, and treats his Creator more contemptibly than he would use one of his inferiours, when he finds that God will not hold him guiltless for take-

*taking his name in vain?* In vain indeed, since it redounds so much to the dishonour of his Maker, so much to the prejudice of his Soul, without any the least procurement, nay prospect of advantage, even in his temporal interests?

What refuge shall they find, who avowedly declare against all religion, denying God with the very breath he gave them, and employ that reason by which he exalted them above all earthly creatures, to represent him lower than the meanest? Would the Drunkard be found sitting at his Cups, with his understanding drowned in his liquor, when the *woe* denounced against them that are *mighty to drink Wine*, shall be ready to be put in execution? Would he who hath *greedily gained of his neighbour by extortion*, be taken with the *spoyle of the poor in his house*, when the Lord comes to enter into judgment with him? Would the Perjurer be surprised with a false Oath in his mouth, and the *reward of wickedness in his hands*, when a severer curse than that represented by the *flying Roll*: Zech. 5. 2, 3. shall be sent to *consume*, not his *house*, alone, but himself for ever? Or would the Murderer be caught in the inhumane act, with the

70 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

stains of seeking gore upon him, in that day when *God shall make inquisition for blood?* Let the Hypocrite, who embraces but the shadow of Religion, or the Atheist, who derides the substance, say if they think they could consent that Judgment should overtake the one, imposing upon Heaven, or the other setting it at defiance; when the one shall be *cloathed with shame*, for insincerity in professing religion, and the other condemned for impiety in not professing it at all? when the *last Trumpet's* sound shall summon the dead to arise to judgment; when the *Elements shall melt with fervent heat*, and the Earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up; would we willingly be found living in a destructive course of vice and wickedness, and not rather in the commendable practice of true piety, addressing our selves to Heaven by continual devotions, and qualifying our selves for it by all *holy Conversation and Godliness?*

There is none so brazen-fac'd and shameless that shall then endure to look upon his Judge, or be seen by him; no one so hardened in iniquity, that shall hear his Sentence without horror, without begging the *Mountains to fall on him* and the *Hills to cover him from the face of him that sitteth*

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*The Duty of Self-Observation.* 71

*on the throne.* For when *the great day of his wrath* is come, who shall be able to stand? When our Sins on one hand, shall stand ready to accuse us, and the Devils wait as officiously on the other, to torment us; when Hell shall open its dreadful mouth to swallow us, and an angry Judge condemn us to it; when we shall see the World in a flame about us, and feel our Consciences burning us within; Ah whither shall we flye, where it is impossible to be concealed, and intolerable to appear! where we shall seek refuges as vainly as we spent our lives, and the punishment of our sins shall be as unalterable as our inclinations to them were.

And if our ways do not prove such, when we have thought upon them, as we may expect safety in at this great and terrible day, we ought to endeavour quickly to make them so, that when *our Lord shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.* These are the things about which we are to employ our thoughts, in the consideration of our Ways; from which we may proceed to what must be their business in the Fourth place, *viz.*

IV. *What is the most seasonable time for the exercise of our thoughts in this employment of thinking upon our Ways.*

This is a duty of such weighty consequence and universal obligation, that we cannot be *instant in it out of season*. Yet there are some critical times, when the practice of it is more especially requisite, some times that call aloud on us to exert it.

*First*, When our Eyes wait upon the Lord, not, as the Psalmist's did, in expectation of his shewing mercy, but with apprehensions of his executing some impending Judgments on us. 'Tis true, they are at present *far above out of our sight*, and our circumstances, in respect of most other Nations, discover more of Heavens indulgence, than its anger, and that God has not so much *a controversie with our Land*, as a kindness for it.

While most other people are deafned with the alarms of War, within their borders, and have the Sword unsheathed among them; we, God be praised, only hear the rumours of those hostilities by which they perish, and are without the reach of the Weapons that depopulate their Countries: While the Earth opens its mouth

mouth upon some of them, and swallows thousands as greedily as it did *Corah* and his Company ; we live in as much safety on it, as if we were preserved for its replenishment : While the Sea, not brooking its usual bounds, makes violent encroachments on the Land, and overwhelms multitudes, as it once did *Pharaoh* and his Host, we are secure amidst its waves ; and like *Israel*, owe our protection to them : And while the Heaven brings its auxiliary forces from above, and *the fire of God* destroys what these had spared, as it once did *Sodom* : We are a brand rescued from that consumption, and live to hear in safety the dreadful Narrative of these Calamities. But may we not apprehend that *the evil day* of our affliction is not so far from us, as it seems, or we would put it, since it is greatly to be feared that we are as far from a just fence of the mercy that exempts us from this destruction, as we have been from perishing by it ? or else what means the noise of those crying sins that are generally in vogue amongst us, and have debauched our conversation. That professed Atheism in scoffing at Religion, and despising the Wisdom of fearing God, as the greatest stupidity and foolishness ; that close hypocrisy in using Religion for

74 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

for a pretence to promote our Interests, or cloak our Villanies? That prophane swearing and blasphemy; that common drunkenness and riot; with a long Catalogue of other iniquities, which ought not to be once named, and yet are daily practised among us? When we think on our unsuitable returns for former deliverances; our misimprovement of present mercies; our falseness to our professed end, and declared intentions, our cleaving to our old lusts, and the general depravation of our manners; with that irresolution and *double-minded* wavering, that makes us *instable in all our ways*: When we lay all these together, and represent them to our serious thoughts, we may justly fear that the clouds over us are filled with the Vials of God's wrath; ready to be poured upon our heads, and that the less visible the approach of his vengeance is, the more sudden it will be in surprising us, and that the longer it's defer'd, it will fall the heavier.

For where the *Harvest* is so ripe, it is time to *thrust in the Sickle*. Therefore before the decree bring forth, and the fierce anger of the Lord pass upon us, it will be very opportune to think upon our Ways, and humble our selves after the example of *Ninivie*; that the event may be the same to

us,

## The Duty of Self-Observation. 75

us, and that God seeing our works, that we turn from our evil ways, may *repent of the evil thought upon*, and not execute his vengeance on us, or may *hide us in the day of his anger*.

A Second Season that should put us in remembrance of our Ways, is when we feel the lashes of the Rod and our heavenly father's hand is heavy on us. *When his Judgments are in the earth*, it is time for the *inhabitants of the World to learn righteousness*. And though we now enjoy at home all the ease and plenty of a settled Peace, yet we have a destructive War abroad ; we have enemies to encounter, who are not only envious at our prosperity, and would disturb our quiet, but whose contrivances and attempts are numerous, and restless to subvert our happy Government, and *quench the light of our Israel*, our excellent Religion. Who would enslave our Bodies to an Arbitrary Power, and our Conscience to an Implicit Faith. And is not this a time to think upon our Ways, to see that we do not joyn with our enemies against our selves, and become accessary to our own destruction.

The Signal and Exemplary Piety of those to whom God, for the consummation of our happiness, hath committed the

Su-

76 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

Supream Authority over us, hath often summoned us to this duty, by injoyning several publick solemn humiliations through the Land ; the necessary work and suitable busines of which days, is to examine and inquire into the errors of our ways, the many transgressions and enormities of our lives ; and thereupon to arraign and pass judgment upon our selves before the Lord. This was the voice of God's people in times of suffering and calamity, *let us search and try our Ways, and turn to the Lord our God, Lam. 3. 40. When he flew them they sought him, and turned them early, and enquired after him.* When we are involved in trouble, our thoughts are busie in contrivances to extricate and free our selves, as *when Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb. Hos. 5. 13.* We leave no human means untried, but alas ! in vain we seek to remove the effect of a continuing Cause, we do not find the source and true original of our afflictions, for we enquire for them abroad, when we should look for them at home ; and therefore do not take right measures to remove them. The best and properest remedy is prescribed by the Holy Ghost, *Eccles. 7. 14. in the day of adversity consider. that is,*

## The Duty of Self-Observation. 77

is, we must consider, that *our destruction is of our selves*, and that while our *spiritual whoredoms are many and notorious*; we enquire in vain for *peace*, which is not the portion of the *Wicked*: And therefore 'tis no wonder if we are overtaken with a *Storm*, while like *Jonah*, we are flying from the *presence of the Lord*. *Solomon* informs us, that the best means of obtaining *peace from God*, is, *by pleasing him in our ways*, Prov. 16. 7. for then he will *make all our Enemies to be at peace with us*: We shall have *peace with God*, our *Neighbours*, and our *selves*; the *Wrath of God* shall be appeased, the *fierceness of Men restrained*, and the clamours of *Conscience* silenced. So that in our Personal or National Disquietudes, we must not fly to the *Creature*, and seek Redress from external Succours, but turn our Eyes inward upon our *selves*, and *think upon our ways*, that we may discover what *Idol-Lust* it is to which we pay our homage, that makes *God jealous and incensed*. And when we have observed from whence our Afflictions have their natural rise, we must then employ our Industry, and look diligently, lest *any root of bitterness spring up to trouble us*: And we must take the same course in our Domestick tryals.

If

78 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

If God blows upon our Estates, and wastes them with a secret Curse, and an invisible Consumption, so that we *sow much, and bring in little*; we eat, but have not enough; we drink, but are not filled with drink; and he that earneth Wages, putteth it into a Bag with holes; Then we must think upon our ways; this is the best Prescription can be given for our Relief: And if Disappointments blast our Hopes, and frustrate our Expectations: If Relations prove unnatural, and Friends grow cold; if our Father and Mother forsake us, and our Kinsfolk stand afar off, we need not fear: But if we commit our ways unto the Lord, he will bring our desires to pass, and will take us up, if we think upon our ways, and turn our feet unto his Testimonies.

A third Season that requires this Duty, is, when we implore some special Blessing, and would obtain some signal Favour at God's hands: the Prophet tells *Israel*, *That their sins had withholden good things from them*, Jer. 5. 25. And among other fatal Consequences of their Iniquities, it was one, that they *had separated between their God and them*, Isa. 59. 2. Nor is it strange that Sins that cry aloud should have as much power as a *Whisperer*, to separate chief Friends. He that walks in the counsele

counsel of the ungodly, estranges himself from God ; he goes like the Prodigal *into a far Country*, and hath reason to expect that God should pursue him with Vengeance, rather than follow him with Mercies : for he *draws nigh* to none, but such as make humble and devout Approaches to him, unless it is for their Destruction. He that hath thrown off his filial Obedience, cancels the Bonds of Paternal Love : He that renounces his professed Allegiance, forfeits all Pretences to Protection ; in such cases, we cannot rationally expect that God should cherish us as Subjects, or feed us with the *Childrens Bread* : No, our own Hearts will rather prompt us to conclude he should punish our Undutifulness and Rebellion. If therefore we would be situate in the enjoyment of Mercies temporal or spiritual ; if we would be the Subjects of God's Bounty, and so privileged with Blessings of the Right-hand and the left ; the most compendious way of obtaining both, is to think upon our Ways, so as to turn our Feet unto his Statutes. Wou'd we be honour'd with the inhabitation of God's Presence, we must prepare our selves for his Reception ; and when *our Hearts are clean within us*, he will not take his holy Spirit from us. But we

80 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*  
we cannot expect the *King of Glory* should come into those places, where the *Gates*, instead of being *lifted up*, are shut and made fast against him. Nor will our Sins only withhold spiritual good Things from us, but temporal Advantages too: For God declares, that *if his People had hearkned unto him, and Israel had walked in his ways, he would soon have subdued their Enemies, and turned his hand upon their Adversaries.* And if we will so much befriend our selves as to think upon our ways, and walk in God's, we shall have no Enemies, or at least conquer those that are so. God will then engage in our *Quarrel*, to *plead our Cause against them that strive with us, and fight against them that fight against us;* he will array the Celestial Hosts in our defence, and lead the *Stars* to battel, to *fight against our Enemies.* Nor is this the sole Advantage we shall reap from the faithful discharge of our Duty, in thinking on our Ways, for we shall quickly find him *open the Windows of Heaven, and make his Clouds drop fatness on our Dwellings, and pour out so large a Blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive.*

Such was his liberal dealing with *Solomon*, because he asked the Thing that pleased him, *2 Chron. i. 12.* He not only granted

granted his request of Wisdom and Knowledge for himself, but added Riches and Wealth, and Honour for an Overplus; and we shall not find *his Arm shortened*, or his Bounty contracted towards us, if our Desires are as agreeable to him. In a word, we have been long in expectation of a *blessed Peace*, and we have sometimes thought the *Dove* just hovering over us with the welcom Olive-branch in her Bill; but our *hope* hath been *deferred*, even to the *making our Hearts sick*, and our pregnant Expectations have miscarried, because we have *put our trust in Chariots and Horses*, and have not remembred the Name of the Lord our God, to call him to our help against the mighty, to pray for the Peace of our *Jerusalem*; which is not to be obtained only by a bare Address to Heaven, but by duly qualifying our selves to become acceptable Petitioners at the *Throne of Grace*, that we may receive a favourable Return of our Supplications. In order to which, we must cleanse our Ways, be Holy, Just, and Good, that the Works of our Hands, and the *Meditations of our Hearts*, may gain acceptance for the Words of our Mouths before him: for we know the Lord is so far from hearing Sinners that their *Prayers are an abomination to him*,

G

Prov.

82 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

Prov. 15. 8. and that which should prevail for Audience, makes him Deaf and Inexorable. And how shall the *Wicked* sue for Peace, to whom God hath declared *there is no peace?* How shall they obtain his Pardon for their Sins, when even the Prayers that beg it, help to encrease their number?

*But if any man be a Worshiper of God, and doth his Will, him he heareth :* And it is only by such means that we can hope to perform our Duty acceptably, to sollicite Heaven with such success, as to procure the Nations Peace, as well as pray for it ; and we should think seriously on our Ways in this particular, because it is a Duty we owe our Country as our Political Parent, and we cannot fail therein, without incurring the censure of being of the number of those foolish Sons, who are a heaviness to their Mother.

And indeed if we make a diligent search after the true Cause why the War is continued abroad, with the little success that makes us querulous and unquiet ; we may trace it home to our own Doors, and shall find it lodged within our selves ; that our Unthankfulness for the great Advances which God hath made towards the establishment of our Happiness, and our repining

repining at his Goodness to us, as if we envy'd our own Felicity, and not any neglect, or want of Care or Tenderness in those *Powers*, which God, by his extraordinary Protection hath declared to have been *ordained of him*, hath been the only Obstacle that they have not as happily finished, as they gloriously began the *Restoration of our Peace*.

A fourth Season for thinking on our Ways, is, When we find others generally inconsiderate, and negligent of theirs.

This is the Tenour of St. Paul's Exhortation to the *Ephesians*, that they should *walk circumspeetly, not as Fools, but as wise, redeeming the time*, Ephes. 5. 16. And the Reason he alledges as a cogent Argument, for their observing his Direction, is this, *Because the Days are evil*: The Corruption of the Age in which we live, must be a Motive to our greater Goodness: While others like Fools are prodigal in the expence of their precious irreparable Minutes, it must be our Wisdom to redeem the Time, by making the best Improvement of it; and while they turn Libertines in a loose Latitudinarian course of Life, we must walk circumspeetly, accurately, and exactly, keeping to the nicest Rules, and aspiring to the most elevated

84 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

heights of Christianity. That Advice to *Timothy*, 2 *Ephes.* 4. 23. is much of the same nature, with this to the *Ephesians* ; *Preach the Word, be instant in season, and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine :* And the Apostle assigns this Reason for his Charge, because the Time will come, that Men will not endure sound Doctrine, but will turn away their Ears from the Truth, and be turned to Fables.

The Evil of the Times should incite good Christians to an extraordinary Care and Diligence, that when they see a decay of Piety, they become most earnest to encourage and promote its Restoration ; that when the Light of Religion is darkned, they may, like the Worshippers of the Moon, in an Eclipse, be busiest to defend it from the Fascinations of Impiety that darken it. When the Preaching of the *Gospel*, that is the *Wisdom of God unto Salvation*, seems Foolishness to Men, and the Messengers of those good Tydings meet an unkind reception ; when there is an Apostasie and falling back from the Truth received : This Negligence and Irreligion should quicken our Care and Devotion. Then is the time for Rivers of waters to run down our Eyes, when Men do not keep

## *The Duty of Self-Observation.* 85

*keep God's Law, then is the Season that our Zeal should even consume us, when they forget his Words.*

And when, because of Iniquities thus abounding, the love of many shall grow cold, then ours must be most fervent, because it is then most requisite, as greatest Fires are most seasonable in Frosty-weather.

And when we do not follow the multitude to do evil, nor run with other Men into excess of riot, we are not to be concerned that they resent our Singularity, and take it ill to want our Company in that Carriere, or speak Evil of us for refusing it: For as Jewels cast the greatest lustre in the dark, so Religion appears most amiable when surrounded with Impiety, whose deformed Visage is a Foil to its transcendent Beauty. And they who are *blameless and harmless*, who prove themselves the Sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation: *shine as Lights in the world among them.* The rarity of Things is a great enhancement of their Value. Lot had not been so eminent for his Righteousness in any other City, as in Sodom; where there were not Ten more of the same rank and level in Righteousness to be found. What an illustrious Figure did Obadiah make in the Court of Ahab, or the

86 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

*Saints in Nero's House?* and what a singular Character was it of *Noah*, that he was a *perfect man in his generation*, when the World was so corrupt and foul, that the Deluge could sooner drown than cleanse it? The Memory of *Job* is sweeter than all the Aromatic Scents that perfume the Air of his Native *Arabia*, and the World will be for ever as loud in celebrating *Athanasius*, as he once was in opposing it: Nor had it so much reason to admire its universal *Arianism*, as this single Oppugner of that *Heresie*. And when we find St. *Paul* advising *Timothy* to *drink no longer Water*: We must admire such Temperance among the *Ephesians*, who lived in all the Luxury of *Asia*, and are said to have banished *Hermodorus* for being Sober and Abstemious.

It is a memorable Scripture, which may be to us instead of all Examples, That *when men called the Proud happy, and said, it was in vain for them to serve the Lord*, Mal. 3. 16. in that height of Impurity. *They that feared the Lord spake often to another, and a book of remembrance was writ for them.* God was so strangely pleased with their exemplary deference to Religion, that he made it his own care to have the Names of those pious Men recorded, that he might select them

them for his own, *in the Day when he made up his Jewels.*

Among which the Church of Pergamus would not be in least esteem, since God himself declares, *He knew her works, and that though she dwelt even where Satan's Seat was, yet she held fast his Name, and had not denied his Faith; even in those Days wherein Antipas, his faithful Martyr, was slain,* Rev.2.13. Here was a noble Instance of true Piety, to adhere to God, and assert his Power in the midst of Satan's own Dominions; to hold fast his Name, though they parted with their Lives, and not to deny his Faith, though they had before them in the Martyr'd *Antipas*, a dreadful Argument of the danger of professing it.

But though there are these special Times that require our thinking on our Ways, there is not any time wherein we can be excused from the performance of our Duty in this Employment; for every present Minute of our lives, is a proper season for it, and indeed requires it, because we have no assurance of a future Opportunity. For besides the uncertainty of our enjoying Life, there is as much of our obtaining Grace, to put it into practice. Wherefore it is the *Apostle's Annotation* on the Text, *Psalm 95. 7. To day if you will hear his*

*G 4 voice,*

88 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

*voice, harden not your hearts: That God li-*  
*miteth a certain Day, and that it does not*  
*exceed the present Time, Heb. 4. 7. And*  
*indeed it is more necessary every Day than*  
*other, because the more our Days encrease,*  
*the longer time hath been neglected, and*  
*the less remains to be employed about*  
*it.*

We cannot launch into the Ocean of Thought and Self-reflection, till we are carried by the motions of the Spirit, and that *Wind blows only where it listeth*; and if we neglect its favouring Gales, it will shift to another Point, and leave us becalmed in our inconsideration, till the Tempest of unthought of Death makes Shipwreck of our Souls, and sinks us into Hell.

Shall we then be, like *Antipater*, not at leisure, when our Thoughts would present us with a Treatise of the Way to Happiness? Such procrastination may expose us to the Fate of *Archias the Theban*, who neglected reading the Account that was given into his hand of a Conspiracy against him, till it was put in execution. What an unreasonable method is it, when God commands us to think upon our Ways to Day, to suspend our Obedience till To-morrow; and though that is a time of our own appointing,

pointing, it happens, that when we live to that To-morrow, our Thoughts, instead of reaching it, are by one Days journey farther off. And can we hope that after such resistance against the Influence of God's Holy Spirit, he will put it into our power again to shew our spight, and grieve him with a second refusal?

It is a *Maxim*, that in War there is no allowance for a second Oversight, because the first false Step usually puts things beyond recovery ; and he that hath once neglected the Opportunity of thinking on his Ways, may never have it in his power to repeat the Fault. The sense of this made our Saviour weep over *Jerusalem*, to find that *the things belonging to her peace, were hidden from her Eyes*, because she would take no notice of them *in the Day* when they were laid before her.

Now having considered the Season for performing this Duty, let us enquire into the Motives and Inducements that oblige us to it.

And one Reason why we should think upon our Ways, is, because God is a strict Observer of them. *He looks from Heaven, he beholdeth all the Sons of Men, he fashioneth their Hearts alike, and considereth all their work,* Psalm 33.13.15. And it is not strange that

90 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

that he ~~who~~ fills Heaven and Earth, and is present in all places, should have a knowledge of all things, since he searches and tries them out: Not that God can be thought to enquire or search after any thing, as being unknown to him, but that he knows all things as perfectly and exactly as 'tis possible to do by the strictest scrutiny: there is nothing so minute in us, no Action so mean and indifferent, such as the motion of our Bodies, *our down-sitting and up-rising*, but God takes notice of it; there is not a word in our Tongues, but he knows it altogether; not a syllable we utter, but he understands it; nay the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, are so far from being a secret to him, that he is better acquainted with them, than we are our selves; he understands them afar off, even before we have conceived them: and there is a powerful Reason for it, since he hath fashioned us behind and before, he hath possessed our reins, and our substance was not hid from him when we were made in secret; for his Eyes saw it, yet being unperfect in the Embryo. And it is no wonder that he should be acquainted with the Work of his own Hands, that he should know us better than we do our selves, since we are a Wonder to our selves, the Structure of

our

our Bodies, the use and service of every particular Vessel, with the Artifice and Powers of Sense, are things beyond our Capacity to explain or understand ; much more, if we consider our nobler part the Soul, by what secret and mysterious tyes it is united to the Body, by what power it actuates and enlivens our mortal Clay ; *such knowledge is too wonderful for us, we cannot attain unto it.* But with God it is no more than for a VVorkman to understand what he hath wrought when his VVork is finished. 'Tis in vain therefore to think of concealing our selves from our Creator, in whose sight and presence we continually remain ; we cannot hide our selves in secret places where he shall not see us ; nor is there any refuge, where we may shun *his Spirit, or avoid his Presence : If we ascend to Heaven, he is there ; if we make our bed in Hell, he is there also.* Not that he follows us to either, but is already there before us. And if neither of these can shelter us, much less can *the utmost parts of the Earth, or the depth of the Sea conceal us :* Neither *can the Darkness cover us, for that and the Light to him are both alike :* So that he sees all things where he is, and he is in all places, in several respects. As first, by his Essence, the extent whereof is no more

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92 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

to be measured by our notion of place, than the duration of it, which is eternal, by our account of Time. It was a right Notion which *Virgil* had of God's essential Presence, and good Divinity, though misapplied to *Jupiter*; that all things were full of him, that his Nature was not to be circumscribed by our narrow Apprehension, and that he might with as much reason be totally excluded from all the Universe, as from the least part or angle of it. Nor is he present only as an idle Spectator among his Creatures, or employed in doing them any injury; his Goodness is as largely extended as his Presence, and more communicative of it self. Which will appear, if we consider, Secondly, that he is every where by his Operation and Influence; that *in him we live, and move, and have our being.* And thirdly, That he is every where by his Providence; that care which he continually manifests for the Welfare and Preservation of his Creatures, *in filling them with plenteousness, which makes the Eyes of all things wait upon him.*

But how little soever we may think ourselves concern'd in these respects of God's Omnipresence, there is another which we must consider; and that is, his being every

## *The Duty of Self-Observation.* 93

ry where, and always present with us as a Witness of our Actions.

*He sees our Ways, and counts all our Steps;* if we have walked in vanity, or our Feet have hastened to deceit; if our steps have turned out of the way, and our hearts rambled after our eyes; he weighs us in an even balance; and there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves, or their wicked deeds from him: For he is concerned to have his Laws obeyed, and to do an impartial Justice, by rewarding all the Observers, and punishing all the Transgressors of them; and therefore is present with every one, and strictly notes his Actions, whether good or bad, that he may know his Integrity, and not fail to give him a suitable Recompence. Now the Judgment that is made of any Action, depends chiefly upon the Actor's design and intention in it; the sincerity or insincerity of which, is not easily discernable by Man; since by subtle Reserves, we keep our little World *incognito*, and free from the Discoveries of Men; and therefore it is requisite that, as we have nothing, but what we have received from God, so we should have nothing, but what should be liable to his Observation; that we may be punished and rewarded by him, not according.

94 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

to the appearance, but the reality of our Deserts, which can never be truly understood by Men, or recompensed by humane Laws, but can as little escape his sight and animadversion, to whom all Hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid. And since no place of retirement, can conceal us, no cunning disguise us from his knowledge: and since he is a Judge to punish, as well as a Witness to remark our Ways; how ought this Consideration to put a restraint upon us from entertaining wicked thoughts which *are an abomination to him*; from uttering *idle words*; for every one of which we shall *give an account in the Day of Judgment*; and from working *Iniquity*, which will be *our ruine*, in so affright and terrible a Presence?

How shall we dare to attempt or design any thing that is ill, if we will give our selves leave to think, that how private soever we are, how closely soever secured from the Eyes of Men, yet an avenging God stands by and sees us; a God who *will bring every work to judgment, with every secret thing*? He must be a bold Thief who would venture to steal before a Judge; and there are no Men so profligate and rude, into whom the Presence of an earthly Prince would not strike an awe, and deter

ter them from the violation of his Precepts to his Face. Nay, the company of some grave serious Person, to whom an unwilling deference is paid, shall restrain the lewdest and profanest Wretches, and confine them within the bounds of Modesty and good Manners: And shall we have a greater Dread and Reverence for a temporal and momentany Authority, and respect frail man meerly on the account of his God-like Power and Qualities, more than him who is the Author of that Power, and the Original of those Perfections? If we are afraid to have our Fellow-creatures conscious of our Crimes, why do not we stand more in awe of the most effectual Witness, God himself? Is it because we think he will keep our Counsel, and never publish or divulge our Secrets? Let not that unhappy Mistake abuse us, it would be well for us indeed, if the reason of God's continual Presence with us, were only to be informed of our Doings, and to satisfie his Curiosity; and that he would be content with making Remarks upon our Actions, without giving us any farther trouble; but we may be sure the end of his Presence with us, and Knowledge of us, is, that he may do us justice, which he doth not always defer till the

Great

96 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

Great Day of General Accounts, when the secret of all hearts shall be disclosed: For we see often, the closest Sinners, who have committed their Wickedness with the greatest secrecy imaginable, and thought themselves secure, because no mortal Eye cou'd detect or excuse them; have been discovered purely by Providence: And the most exquisite Hypocrites have in time had their Wizards taken off, by the hand of an over-ruling Power; whose Wise Disposal is never more conspicuous, than in giving such Dissemblers and Triflers their due reward. But if none of these extraordinary events should happen, yet is not the Vengeance of that *Day in which he will judge the world with righteousness*, to be at all rever'd and dreaded? Is not that *shame and confusion of face*, which will then come on all, especially secret Sinners; over and above the sentence of Eternal Punishment, to be regarded in the least, when our secret Sins shall be laid as open in the presence of Angels, Men, and Devils, as they were to God before? When *whatsoever hath been done in secret shall be proclaimed up-on the house-top*; and we shall find too late, that all our dissimulation served only to expose us the more at last.

If

If then we would gain Esteem and Credit in the World ; if we would escape Contempt and Ignominy both here and before the Great Tribunal, if we would prove our selves true and faithful Servants of our Master ; the only way is to have this Thought always in our Minds, that whether we are allured and tempted to any Evil by privacy and opportunity ; or whether we are moved to any Good, whether publick or private ; we are in God's sight, *who sees in secret, and will reward us openly.* It is certain we do not neglect to think upon our Ways, on this account, for want of being reminded of it ; for God complains of our little regard to his taking notice of our Ways, *that we consider not in our Hearts, that he considers all our Wickedness, that they are before his Face,* Hos. 7. 2. He cannot but admire that we should forget what he remembers, especially when our remembraunce of our Sins, is the most effectual means to make him think on them no more ; or that we should never look back to that which is still before his Face, as if that which will expose us to his Fury, were not worth our concern or regard. If then our Ways are considered by him, who raised us out of the Dust, and can with a Frown reduce us to our primitive No-

H thing:

98 *Thoughts well Employ'd* : Or,

thing : Nay, if he, who cannot only kill the Body, but cast both Body and Soul into Hell-fire eternally ; sets our Misdeeds before him, and our secret Sins in the light of his Countenance : Sure this is reason enough to prevail with us to stay awhile and peruse some few Lines in the Volume of our selves, to employ our Thoughts a little in reflecting on our Ways, lest by the neglect of that, we come to suffer for them.

A Second Reason for our thinking on our *Ways*, is, because *Satan* is a curious Inquisitor into them : For by his Answer to the Question which God propounded, *Hast thou considered my Servant Job?* It is very easie to collect, that *Job* was no stranger to his Observation : He cou'd familiarly recount what Disbursements the Bounty of Heaven had made in favour of him, and repeat the whole Catalogue of the Mercies he had received ; how he was incircled in the Arms of Providence, and seated in a Confluence of Enjoyments. For compassing the Earth, and going to and fro in it, is his perpetual busines, and the design of all his Travel is to make Discoveries of what he may devour. Now we know he is our professed Adversary, there is an irreconcilable Enmity between the Seed of the Woman and the Serpent, which puts him upon

upon unwearied undertakings to destroy us : For as he delights in Sin, because it is repugnant to God's Holiness, and abominable in his sight ; so he hates us on God's account, because we bear his Image and resemblance, which is not so wholly defaced in Man as in himself. 'Tis his design therefore to destroy the least Representation of that Image, where he finds it ; and this he endeavours, first as a Tempter, to entice us to commit Wickedness, and then as an Informer to betray us ; for it is his whole busines to render us as odious to God, as he hath made himself. We have an Instance of this in *Job* ; for though God was pleased to declare the Satisfaction he had concerning the *Uprightness* and *Perfection* of that holy Man, yet the Devil's Malice and Impudence was so great, that he pretended to know more of him, than God himself ; and he undertook to discover an Evil in him, which was undeserved by his All-seeing Eye. So that to execute and indulge his Malice in our Ruine, he is never idle, but still enquiring into our ways, to find how he may endanger us : And he meets no difficulty in the undertaking, the Temperament, Composure, and Natural Disposition of our Bodies, lye more open to his View, than to

100 *Thoughts well Employ'd* : Or,

the Knowledge of the most exquisite Physician ; he can interpret the silent language of a Blush, and shrewdly guess at the true Original of a Sigh ; and the Source of our Tears, though to others, as undiscoverable as the Head of *Nile*, is easily found out by him. By the disturbances of our Sleep, and those various Agitations whereby we do almost render our Dreams intelligible, he is able to make very near Conjectures, by what Methods he may best ensnare us, and lays those Baits before us, which he finds most agreeable to our Appetites. He is a critical Overseer of our Performances, and either endeavours to vitiate and corrupt, whatever he fees good, or accuses us to our selves and Heaven, for whatever he finds amiss. If he beholds Fervency and Devotion in our Prayers, he fills us with wandring Thoughts to cool and interrupt it ; if he perceives in us a religious Observance of God's Laws, and a conscientious Diligence in the performance of our Christian Duty, he perswades us to believe that it is needless, as he once did our first Parents ; and that though we remit of the exactness of our Obedience, *we shall not surely die* ; and then if he prevails upon upon us to eat any forbidden Fruit, to transgress the Commandments of our God,

God, he presently gives us the shameful Prospect of our Nakedness, possesses us with Dread and Trembling, and makes us *hide our selves from the Presence of the Almighty*. Or if for awhile he lets us please our selves in a belief, that *we are become as Gods*, when indeed we are nearest to the state of Devils; yet, he will at some time set our Sins before us, perhaps when we are weary of his bondage, and begin to look towards Heaven, to make us despair of reception there; or, if not when we would part with him, yet when we are taking a farewell of the World; Then he, who before *sewed Pillows to our Elbows*, will stuff our Death-beds full of Thorns, and fill our Souls with the torturing recollection of our Wickedness, making us to *remember our own evil ways, and our doings that were not good*; so that we shall loath our selves in our own sight, for our *Iniquities, and for our Abominations*. Our abuse of God's Mercies, our neglect of holy Duties, our deafness to the Overtures of Grace, our disregard of Threatnings, our incorrigibleness under Judgments, our profuse expence of Time, our breach of Vows and Resolutions of Amendment, and our Wickedness and Rebellion of every kind, will be the frightful Topicks to fur-

102 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

hish him with Arguments to make us conclude against our selves, that we are lost for ever, and that our Life and Hope is perished from the Lord.

And if he shall not thus be able to affright and drive us into Despair, or rob us of our Spiritual Consolations; yet the sense and satisfaction of them will be much lessened and allayed. Nor can we doubt the extent of this our Adversary's Knowledge, to be thus vast, or his employing it to this pernicious end; if we consider his Nature, that he is a Spirit in respect of his Essence, and by the Sublimity of that, arrives at his extraordinary Knowledge, besides the acquired Experience of long Practice. So that by his Power we find that he is great, and of the Rank of the first Creatures: But he is an evil Spirit too, fallen from the highest Degree of Eminency, to the lowest Abyss of Misery, and fraught with an inveterate Malice against the Glory of his Creator, which he can vent no otherwise, but in the ruine of his most endeared Creature Man, that so he may affront God in his Representative. And if it seems strange to us that the Eye which runs through the whole Earth, and surveys in an instant the largest extent of all Things, should require, or allow the help

help of an Informer ; we shall find it designed for our Advantage ; that the fear of such an Enemy , might make us the more cautious of our Ways ; since it is requisite for our safety, to have Enemies to upbraid, as well as Friends to instruct us : And if we are wise, we shall make an Advantage of the Devil's Enmity ; and *the roaring of this Lion* should make us learn of *the Beasts of the Forest*, to tremble and be afraid to commit any thing, that will give him opportunity to encrease his noise against us, or get us into his power.

A Third Reason why we should think upon our Ways, is, because Wicked-men take notice of them.

The *Psalmist* tells us, that *the wicked watcheth*, ( the Latin Translation is, *considereth*) *the righteous*, Psalm 37. 32. for Wicked-men have a near resemblance of *their Father the Devil* ; and, as if they were fond of proving themselves his Sons, are exact Imitators of his Works : For as *the Devil goeth about as a roaring Lion, seeking whom he may devour* ; so *the wicked lieth in wait secretly as a Lion in his Den, to catch the poor*. They *watch for our Souls*, not as our Spiritual Teachers are said to do, but as God threatens *Israel* he will do, *for evil, and not for good*, Jer. 44. 27. with the same

diligence, and no les ill design, that made the Prophet complain, *his familiars watched for his halting*, Jer. 20. 10. for the Wicked are delighted at the Failings of the Just, and pleased to find occasion of *sharpening their Reproaches against them*. Which made David pray, to *have his Eyes enlightened, that he might not sleep the sleep of death, lest his Enemies should say, they had prevailed against him, and those that troubled him should rejoice when he was moved*, Psalm 13. 3, 4. Nay, such is their Malice, that where they have no real Objection, they will invent Pretences, and make a way to blast us where they do not find one, according to their dealing with the Prophet, who cry'd, *Report, and we will report it*. They hope that a bold Calumny will gain belief, or if it cannot ruine the Credit of good Men in the World, yet it may at least bring their Innocence into suspicion. Nor is this all, their Hatred hath a farther aim; for the Reproaches that seem directed against the persons of the Righteous, are as well designed against their Profession, and Religion is wounded thro' the sides of its Adherents.

When the Holy Ghost by his miraculous Descent on the *Apostles*, inspired them with the *Gift of various Tongues*, to speak  
*the*

*the wonderful things of God:* How ready were the Jews to impute it to excess of Wine and Drunkenness? And even the spotless irreproachable Life of the Holy Jesus, that immaculate Lamb of God, could not escape the evil Eye of the Pharisees, who observed and watched him, not to take example by him, but to traduce and vilifie him, to find an occasion of bringing *an Accusation against him*, and mis-representing him to the World. For the Righteous are not of the World, and therefore are hated in it; and the ground of this hatred which makes the Wicked lye in wait for them, is, because they are not for their turn, but directly contrary to their doings, they upbraid them with their offending of the law, and object to their infamy, the Transgressions of their Education, Wisd. 2. 13. As the Piety of a good Man's life, has no communication with the Wickedness of the Ungodly's Ways; so it is a silent Reproof of their Irregularities and ill Conduct, and they hate the Light of those holy Performances which discovers the Impurity of theirs: Wherefore they watch his Goings, that if he slips, they may reproach him with it, in hope that the aggravating his errors, will help to extenuate their own.

And while as the *Psalmist* speaks, *They set*

106 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,  
*set their mouth against the Heavens*, Psalm  
73. 9. We cannot wonder *their Tongue*  
*should walk through the Earth*, to defame  
the Candidates of Heaven. But the less  
occasion they have for their Malice, the  
less trouble it will give us; and while  
their Endeavours are employed to blacken  
and expose us, let ours be as busie to de-  
feat and disappoint them. Thus we shall  
tire their Spight, *put their Ignorance to si-*  
*lence*, and make them at last *ashamed*, *having*  
*no evil thing to say against us*. But if we  
find that we have given occasion for their  
Accusations, we have the greater reason  
to think upon our Ways, and look into our  
selves, that we may remove the Cause of  
an Effect so intolerable to us. And thus  
our Enemies may be-friend us; nay Ma-  
lice it self be as advantageous as the great-  
est Kindness, and by upbraiding us with  
our Errours, prevail with us to correct  
them sooner than perhaps we would at the  
instance of our most endear'd Associates.  
As *Saul's* design to ruine *David*, by putting  
him upon dangerous Enterprizes, made  
him more beloved in *Israel*, and *his Name*  
*precious through the Kingdom*: So we shall  
be exalted and illustrated in the Piety and  
Eminency of our Conversation, by the En-  
deavours of Wicked-men to lessen and e-  
clipse

clipse us ; their nicer Observation will discover to us those Blemishes in our selves, which have at any time escaped our own Inspection ; and while they wait for us to destroy us, they will send us to consider God's Testimonies.

A Fourth Reason for our thinking upon our Ways, is, because there will come a time when we shall heartily repent the neglect of it, and wish our Thoughts had been so employed. *These things thou did'st* ( saith God to the Wicked ) *Psalm 50.21.*  
*and I kept silence, but I will reprove thee, and set thy sins in order before thee.* God's silence will not last for ever, there will be a time for him to speak and to reprove, when *he shall smite the Earth with the Rod of his Mouth, and with the Breath of his Lips shall slay the Wicked :* for though he be a righteous Judge, strong and patient, a God that will not always be chiding ; yet to be provoked every day, to be continually made to serve with our sins, and wearied with our iniquities, will turn his Patience into Wrath and Indignation ; then he shall arise as one out of sleep, and as a Giant refreshed with Wine : then he shall bring Distress and Anguish upon us, and we shall eat the fruit of our own ways, and be filled with our own devices. Will it not be a terrifying Scene, when

108 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

when God opens the black Catalogue of our Sins before our Eyes, and calls it over in our hearing; when he taxes us with Sins of Omission and of Commission, with secret and with open Perpetrations; with Sins of Ignorance and Inadvertency, and with wilful and deliberate Transgressions? Then we shall be severely punished for the evil of our Ways, because we would not think upon them time enough to amend them.

Now the neglect of employing our thoughts in the consideration of our Ways, will be insupportable to us upon several accounts.

First, When we think upon the happy Condition of those who faithfully performed this Duty, and had their *Sins ever before them*, to reform them. Our Saviour tells the Jews, that *there shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth among them*, when *they shall see Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets in the Kingdom of God, and be themselves thrust out*, St. Luke 13. 28. What an aggravation of our Misery will it be to see some who have been our Fellow-Citizens on Earth, made Denizens of the *New Jerusalem*, while we are excluded the Society? How shall we afflict our selves, when we see some of our own

own Family received into the *Household of God*, while we are not allowed to *tarry in his sight*? what Heat will it add to the unquenchable Flames wherein we burn, to look on some who have been our Familiars and Intimates, invited into endless Joys, while a sad separation, as distant and remote as Hell from Heaven, is made between us, and we shall be sentenced to depart into everlasting Fire? shall not the *Sorrows of our Hearts be enlarged*, as the Rich-man's were in Hell, to see *Lazarus comforted*, while he was tormented; and happy in *Abraham's Bosom*, while he was miserable in the *Flames*? Then we shall condemn and bewail our Folly and Negligence, that we did not think upon our Ways, nor see them in the valley of Tears, but went on in the way of Sinners, which though it was made plain with Stones, had the Pit of Hell at the end thereof.

When we hear the Hymns and Allelujahs, the Praises and Acclamations of Angels and Saints, and *Spirits of just Men made perfect*, with which Heaven resounds, we shall lament and howl, as loud as they rejoice, and add Horrour to the Regions of Darkness, by our Yellings. When we consider what a Glorious Liberty, what a Harmonious Quiet, what a Full Felicity  
the

110 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*  
the Souls of the Blest enjoy ; and that it  
was once within our Option, and might  
have been our Portion too ; when we see  
*what great Things the Lord hath done for*  
*them who thought upon their ways ; who set*  
*them up Way-marks , and set their Hearts*  
*toward the high-way to Heaven :* And  
with what Rigours he pursues those who  
did not hearken to that voyce which cry'd  
to them, *stand in awe, and sin not, commune*  
*with your own hearts : Ask for the old way,*  
*where is the good way, and walk therein, and*  
*you shall find rest for your Souls :* We shall  
then be exceeding sorry that we did not  
walk therein, that we did not hearken to  
our God.

Secondly , When we call to remem-  
brance for what it was that we forfeited  
our Interest in Heaven, we shall repent  
that we did not think upon our imprudent  
Courses, to *turn our feet from every evil*  
*way.* When we perceive with what in-  
finite Treasures we have parted, how we  
have sold *an Inheritance unspeakably great,*  
and yet *have nothing in our hands to shew.*  
Will not our Affliction be suited to our  
Loss ? The happy State of our first Pa-  
rents is a Topick that affords us Argu-  
ments to condemn their Folly in forfeit-  
ing their Interests ; that being great in the  
Command

Command of *Eden*, and greater in their Innocence ; so that they were as free from the Inclination to, as the Commission of an Ill, their Minds like their Dwelling, did abound with variety of Delight, and wanted nothing to render their Joys equal to those of *Paradise* ; yet they would, for the inconsiderable satisfaction of Tasting the Fruit of one forbidden Tree, not only divest themselves of the Priviledge they enjoyed, of using whatever else was in the Garden, but throw themselves out of that happy Seat, and the Favour of their God. And yet we daily split upon the same Rock, for want of thinking on our Ways.

But when, like them, we see our Nakedness, when we find the specious appearances of Sin prove a loathsom Deformity to affright us ; when we see our Riches have found their Wings, our Pleasures disappear, our Honours drop away ; when we find that we have made *Esau's* Bargain, and sold our Birth-right for a morsel of Meat, and shall, like him, find no place for Repentance, though we seek it carefully with Tears : Then we shall nauseate and abhor the Vanities that seduced and alienated our Affections from the Joys above, and made us mispend our time, and wander out

112 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

out of our way, in pursuing Shadows, when we should have been employed in searching for the Substance; When we consider that we have parted with the *Pearl of price* for Trifles, and with a Kingdom, and that of Glory too, for a Dungeon, shall we not take up the Prophet's Wish, *That our Heads were Waters, and our Eyes so well supplied with Tears, that we might weep Day and Night for the Ruine of our Souls.* But alas! we need not wish what will be a main part of our punishment.

When we are condemn'd to the Regions of Misery and Horrour, what shewry Eyes, and mournful Looks shall we cast back upon the *amiable Dwellings of the Lord of Hosts*; the glorious Mansions of the Righteous, which we never would believe were worth our seeking, till they were past our finding, and then perceived too late, they were as much above our Admirations, as our Reach? Had we divested our selves of that Light with which the Saints are clothed, for Nakedness or a suit of *Fig-leaves* only, even that had been a matchless Folly, an unparallel'd Madness; but to be clothed with Shame and Confusion, and vested with scorching Flames besides: to part with all the Joys of

of Heaven for Stripes ; which, like Joseph's Irons, will enter into our Souls, and whose Smart will continue to Eternity : To assign a Name to this, or to express it fully, is above the reach of Invention, and beyond the power of Eloquence.

But thirdly, When to the Thoughts of our lost Happiness, we shall add the dismal consideration, that it can never be recovered ; when we see no prospect of a Restoration, no offer of any terms for Heaven ; but find our selves, nay our very Hopes shut out, by the interposition of an unpassable Gulf ; when we feel our Condition so extreamly miserable, that 'tis impossible to encrease our Sufferings, and yet as impossible to lessen them : This will make us roar for the *very disquiet of our Souls*. The sense of this will corrode our Vitals, and prove the *never-dying Worm* to gnaw and torture us eternally. Could we, amidst these Terrors, find any ground to *hope in the day of evil*, or foresee any likelihood of an end to these our Labours, though never so remote ; this would alleviate the pain and misery of them : Or were we condemned to any *Flames* but those that are *unquenchable*, confin'd to any Prison but a *Hell*, whence there is no *redemption* ; if our Access to Heaven was

prohibited by any other Intrenchments than that of Impossibility; or could we be freed from the worft of all the Fiends that torture us, Despair: This would prove a Relaxation of our Sufferings, and give us ease amidst our Torments; would make us endure Hell-fire, with *Scivola's* Resolution, and bear its Violence with an Apathy above the Precepts of the *Stoicks*. But Damnation hath no such kind allay to mitigate its Rigour, and render it less formidable; there is no such comfortable glimpse of Light arises in the Regions of eternal Darknes. When we are once consigned to this wretched state, there will be no deliverance from it; though we *die daily in it*, we shall never die so happily, as to come to a period of our Sufferings; and what expectation can we cherish of an end of other things, where even Death it self becomes immortal?

And then fourthly, If such infinite Misery can receive an addition, it will be one, that we shall live unpitied in it. Heaven that onely can relieve us, will be deaf to all our Cries, and that *Compassion* that doth *never fail*, will not however extend it self to us. There will be no *sounding of God's Bowels, or of his Mercies towards us*: And to which of the *Saints* shall we turn? Abraham  
will

will be ignorant of us, and Isræl will not acknowledge us. Not all the rich Glutton's Oratory could move the Father of the Faithful to a Sense or Commiseration of his Torments, all his Entreaties could not prevail for *a drop of water to cool his Tongue*, and allay the intolerable Heat that forced it to complain, and yet render'd it unable; for how could he expect to find Compassion, who himself had none? Or was it not just, that for want of shewing Mercy, he should have *Judgment without Mercy*? Had he thought upon his Ways in time, he would not have stopped his Ears at the *Cry of the Poor*, nor denied his Crums to *Lazarus*, because he would have foreseen the fatal Consequence of such an Uncharitableness, the Punishment it brought upon him, that *he should also cry, and not be heard.*

Our Friends, who in this *vale of misery*, sympathize in all our Sorrows, who pine when we are sick, languish when we are weak, and weep when we are afflicted; who feel our Sufferings, and resent our Sorrows as their own, will put off all that Tenderness in the other World, as they do Mortality, they will quit their Affection with their Flesh, in which alone vve are related; and retain no Concern, no Pity

116 *Thoughts well Employ'd* : Or,  
for us in that state where we shall want  
it most.

Even the fond Mother, by whose Indulgence God is sometimes pleased to represent his Love to Men, and for whom he supposes it almost impossible to forget her Child, that *she should not have compassion on the Son of her Womb*; She may, nay she will there forget him. Not the bearing on her Knees, or the Suckling at her Breast, will make her Bowels yearn, or her Eyes shed one kind Tear to quench the Fire that torments her miserable off-spring.

For if our Friends are happier than we, and have their Residence in Heaven, there *all Tears are wiped away, and neither sorrow nor crying shall be heard*. It is inconsistent with the Felicity of that Place to admit of any diminution, and though the Conversion of one Sinner, makes an addition to the joy, as well as to the number of the blessed; the damnation of ten thousand will not lessen it.

And if our Friends are of that number, and condemned to the same deplorable circumstances with us; they will be so employed in bewailing their own Misery, that they cannot be at leisure to consider ours. Nay, perhaps our sharing in their Torments, may rather lessen than encrease them,

them ; for they will have ill-nature enough to be pleased at the Tortures we endure, as well as at their having Fellow-sufferers. At least 'tis sure the Saints in Heaven shall rejoice at our Destruction, when *it cometh as a whirlwind*, and laugh at our Distress and Anguish ; and when they see us rooted out of the *land of the living*, shall mock and say, *Lo, these are the men that made not God their strength, but strengthned themselves in wickedness* : These are the Men that would not think upon their Ways, to refrain their Feet from every *evil way*, and to *guide them into the way of peace*. Thus shall they triumph at the Glorification of Divine Justice, tho' in the ruine of their nearest Relations, and praise God for ever, because it is his doing. And can we think upon these doleful Consequences of our Inconsiderateness, and not be frightened into a speedy Examination of our Ways ? What though when we rake the Dunghil, we find nothing but Nastiness and Stench ; when we draw the Scene, we discover nothing but Guilt and Horrour ; is it not better to endure this for awhile by choice, than to be condemned to it for ever, and suffer it by compulsion ? Is it not more eligible to bestow a little time in this Employment, with some

118 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

prospect of Advantage, than to be forced to it always, with as little hope of mending our Condition, as of reforming the Ways that brought us to it?

This Work is now our Duty, and upon the right performance of it, will become our Advantage too, and prove its own Reward: but the neglect of it will be severely punished, in the ruine that will infallibly attend it; and surely the not thinking at all upon our Ways, must be very destructive, since we may be deceived, and make a wrong Estimate of them, when they do employ our Thoughts.

Which is a Fifth Motive to induce us to make the Inspection of our Ways the great Business and Employment of our Thoughts.

Solomon, who gave his Heart to seek and search out by Wisdom, concerning all things that are done under Heaven, discovered in his Survey, a *Way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*, Prov. 14. 12. So that we may be in a way of which we may entertain a good Opinion, and sing a *Requiem* to our Souls, through a confidence of our Security therein; but upon better search, and more strict examination, we shall find it dangerous and destructive; the *way to Hell*,

*Hell, and the descent to the Chambers of Death.* Nay, 'tis our Misfortune, that as there are many means to take us from the World, and but one to bring us into it; so there are several Ways to deprive us of Eternal Life, and but one that can conduct us to it: And if we consult the Proverbs, we shall find that *every way of a man is right in his own Eyes*, Prov. 21.2. The Adulterer thinks his *stollen waters sweet, and his bread eaten in secret pleasant, and knows not that the dead are there, and that the guests of that Vice are in the depths of Hell.* The Libertine *rejoices in his youth, and walks in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes, and considers not, that for all these things God will bring him into judgment.* The rich man's wealth is his strong City, and as an high Wall in his own conceit, and he is wise in his own eyes, in preparing thus for his security: But alas, *his riches will not profit him in the day of wrath, and he that trusts in them shall fall.* And these are not the onely Persons under a mistake; there is *a just man too that perisheth in his righteousness.* But though Men may be deceived, who too often look no further than the out-side and appearances of things, God who pondereth the Heart, discerns their Errour: He knows we are partial

120 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

Judges of our own Transactions, and may be bribed and corrupted to pass a favourable Sentence in an ill Cause wherein our selves are interested: He sees those Failings and Corruptions in us, which we over-look, and does not so well approve, is not so fond of us, as we conceit. So that, as nothing is more common and familiar than this Couzenage of our selves, so nothing is more dangerous; especially when the mistake lies in the Opinion of our Ways.

What a dismal thing is it for us to be journeying to Ruine and eternal Misery, and yet go chearfully on, in a belief that we are still at a greater distance from it; to conclude our selves just at the Gate of Heaven, and find at last that we are upon the Confines of Hell. We have in holy Writ, many deplorable Instances of Men pleasing themselves in their conceited Safety, when their Danger was imminent; When *marrying and giving in marriage*, was the Business of the World *in the days of Noah*; as if by the encrease of their Posterity, they designed it should remain for ever, to inherit their Possessions to Eternity; who expected that they should be swept away by a sudden Deluge, and *their places know them no more?*

When

When *the Sun was risen upon the Earth* in the day of *Sodom's Overthrow*, who could have believed that he was then to take his Farewel of that City, that those were the last Smiles his Beams should cast upon it, and that its Glory should decline before his setting? There was nothing discernable in the Face of the Sky, from whence they could presage the approaching Storm. Which made *Lot's Sons-in-law*, as much trifle with the Predictions of their Father, as they thought he did with their belief; they could not fear that a Day introduced with such a glorious Prologue, and whose first Scene opened so delightfully, should have such a Tragical Catastrophe. But while they and their Fellow-Citizens, were pleasing themselves, as *David* did in his *Prosperity*, with the fancy of an unalterable Establishment, and thinking on nothing *but Peace and Safety*, behold a sudden Destruction came upon them, when it was not in their power to escape, and too late they bewailed the Punishment, who made a mock at the Sin that had occasioned it. Thus unhappily do Men, like the effeminate *Agag*, flatter themselves with an Opinion, that *the bitterness of Death is past*, when it is just at hand; and with the rich Fool in the *Gospel*,

122 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

spel, promise themselves *many Days*, when they have not a Night to live. These are Tragical Relations, but we may find a more Melancholy Account of Persons deceived in a Concern more considerable than this transitory Life; even in the important matter of Salvation and Life eternal. Of this number were the foolish Virgins, St. Matth. 25. 11. they expected Entrance into Heaven, and doubtless had fairer Pleas for it, than many of us can make.

They had Lamps, which argued some Light and Heat in their Conversation; they accompanied the Wise with the same Design of meeting Christ, which implied their being of the Communion of Saints on Earth; and therefore, came very confident of Admission into that in Heaven, and cry'd, *Lord, open to us*, as if they were injured to be kept out at all, and that the Gate must immediately fly open on the notice of their Arrival. But they found themselves mistaken, the Bridegroom disowned them, and declared, *He knew them not*. Thus were they disappointed of their Hope in respect of ther Final Estate and Station, and that through a confident Opinion of their Safety. For what *Seneca* says of Wisdom, is as true of Happiness, it

it would be easily attainable, if Men did not hinder their enquiry after it, by thinking it their own already ; for they who are thus *whole* in their own Opinions, vwill never be perswaded that *they have need of a Physician*, nor consult his Skill, till they are past its help. Our blessed Lord tells us of many vwho in the last Day, vwill come to him for Entrance into his Kingdom, and alledge that *they have prophesied in his Name, and in his Name cast out Devils, and in his Name done many wonderful works*: But all the return they shall receive , vwill be this profession , *I never knew you, depart from me ye workers of iniquity*. With vhat Confusion can vve think these Men will be seized, to find themselves so deceived in respect of their eternal Welfare ; That neither the Excellency of their *Preaching to others* shall secure themselves from being *cast away* : Nor their Prophetick foresight of Events, prevent their impending Ruine ; nor their working Miracles, help to effect their own Salvation ; nor their casting out Devils, tend to dispossess *Satan* of his Interest in their Souls? That no regard shall be had to their exquisite Parts, their enlightened Apprehensions, profound Judgments, and Eminency in the World : But that notwith-

notwithstanding these Pretensions, and their being no Strangers to the *Name of Christ*; when they come to plead their Acquaintance, and to knock at Heaven, they shall be sent away ashamed, and not prevail to have the Claim they judged so plausible, admitted? What then may we think will become of us, who have no such Arguments in our behalf, if Men of these Qualifications can miscarry? Should not we think all the Time and Consideration we are Masters of, too little to employ in thinking on our Ways; and that our most deliberate Thoughts would be too cursory and transient, as well as all our Days too short and fugitive, for the performance of a Duty that will everlastingly concern us? Is it not then time that we should with all Seriousness apply our selves to reduce these Rules to practice, to think judiciously upon our Ways; and while we are employed in *working out our Salvation*, by this means, to do it with *fear and trembling*, lest we should take wrong measures in it; and by mistaking the means, fail of obtaining the end: and while we think *our ways are ways of pleasantness, and all our paths are peace*, go on unapprehensive of the Danger and Destruction to which they tend?

And

And now, having gone over the Motives obliging us to the Performance of this Duty; that no Age may think it self excused from this Employment, in which the young and the old are equally concerned; let the following Section be a Remembrancer to both.

The *Psalmist* implies a necessity for a young man to cleanse his way, in prescribing, his taking heed thereto, as the means and best Cathartick, *Psalm 119. 9.*

And indeed this is a Work very suitable to their Age, because it ought to be begun betimes. As therefore they are to remember their Creator, so they must think on the Correspondency of their Ways to his Commands, *in the days of their youth*, when the Reflection will be most easily made, as having but a little time to look back upon, a short History to recollect; and when it will be most advantageous too, in an early precaution, directed to prevent their wandring in the Journey which they have before them. But perhaps this may not relish with those whose active Blood finds a free Circulation in their Veins, whose quick and lively Spirits labour under no Oppression, and therefore think themselves in an Age fitter for Action, than Deliberation; and that  
'tis

126 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,

?tis a properer Season to *crown their Heads with Rose-buds*, than to trouble them with *Cares*, and believe they have Time enough in store to allow many Days to Mirth and Youthful lusts, and yet leave a sufficient Space for being Serious and Considerate. These think they are early at their Duty, if they settle their Thoughts when their Blood begins to stagnate, and become grave and serious, when they grow dull and heavy, and that the fittest Season for *thinking on their Ways*, will be when Age hath rendred them unfit for any but such Melancholy Entertainment. But alas, what Security can they give themselves of arriving at that Time? What Office is there to Assure their Lives to such a Period? Is Youth any more proof against Mortality than Age? Nay, is it not rather more subject to it? We know Flowers are with greater ease nipt in the Bud, and broken from their tender Stalks; than when they are full blown, and an addition to their Age, hath withal encreased their strength. And every Charnel-house will present us with as many Skulls, that still retain their Hair and Teeth, as that had lost those Ornaments, before they saw Corruption. For there are those who *die in their full strength*, or  
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as 'tis in the *Hebrew*, in the strength of their perfection; *with their Breasts full of Milk, and their Bones moistned with Marrow*, as well as those who go sapless to the Grave, and are Skeletons before they die. The Life of Man hangs upon very slender Filaments, and a thousand Accidents, which no Wisdom can foresee, no Power prevent, are always breaking them. He that rejoices in his Youth, may like *Diagoras*, be stifled with his Laughter: Nay, the Passions he indulges may be mortal to him. Fear may kill him, as it did *Herrennus*. Grief may strangle him, as it did *Plautinus*, and he may like *Sylla*, vomit out his Blood and Soul together, in a Transport of immoderate Anger.

Nay Death armed with no other Weapon, than a Grape-stone, the Bone of a Fish, a Fly, a Hair, or his own Spittle; may take him from the World before he hath had any Enjoyment of it. So that there is nothing so feeble and contemptible, but may be as fatal to him, as if the Poles should crack, and bury him in the Ruines of the Universe.

But if he escapes these Casualties, he hath an Enemy within, much more pernicious to him; the Constitution of his Body, which consists of such Materials as are always

128 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

always jarriing and at variance among themselves ; and in this, as in all other civil Discords, which ever Faction gets the better and becomes predominant , the whole Republick is a Sufferer , and the Conquerour , like Sampson pulling down the Philistine's Palace, is himself involv'd in the general Destruction.

'Tis therefore a necessary Caution, that we should not *boast our selves of To-morrow, because we know not what a day may bring forth*, Prov.27.1.

VVe know not with what Births the Womb of Time may be pregnant, or of what Events a few Hours may be delivered. And when we are not secure of a Day, nay cannot command an Hour, or arrest a Minute to wait for us ; shall we promise to our selves length of Days, and encrease of Years, even to old Age ?

If they who depend upon To-morrow for the improvement of their Worldly Fortune , fall under reproof, Jam. 4. 13. What rebuke do they deserve, who defer to employ themselves *in thinking on their Ways*, to a remoter Day, and talk as confidently of futurity, as if it were at their disposal ? Whereas they ought to say, *If the Lord will*, we shall live and think upon our Ways. For Faith unfeigned and sin-

cere,

oere Repentance are not Things that grow within their own Inclosures, they are not their Menials, that they should be so well commanded *to go and come* at a word, like the *Centurion's* Souldiers. These are part of God's Prerogative, to dispose of as he pleases, and Men cannot determine the time wherein they will believe and repent, and withal be sure to find acceptance. Can we think it reasonable that we should consume the Blossom of our Days in the Drudgeries of Sin and Satan, and reserve our withered decrepit Age for the Service of God, or that he will be contented with it? Shall the Strength of our Parts and Spirits, the best of our Time and Substance be spent in *riotous living*, and God only be thought on, when we can sin no more? When our Liberty is restrained by some bodily Distemper, and our Power suspended by some enfeebling Languishment? When the whole course of our Lives hath been a *Carriere to Hell*, will the short Reflection which our remnant of Time will give us leave to make, suffice to think effectually on our Ways, and exercise ourselves aright in a Duty which we have so rarely practised? Habits are the source of Humane Actions, and a habit, the Schoolmen tells us, cannot be contracted, but by

130 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

repeated *Acts*, and there is only one Help and Succour against a vicious Practice, and that is the contrary Custom ; and then what will become of him who hath not time for second Thoughts, and a review of his past Life ? If any one shall object the Case of the penitent Thief ; there are Answers as obvious as the Instance which will supersede the trouble of reciting them ; and we may as well urge the necessity of being in his Circumstances, as to the manner of his Death ; as argue for the Acceptance of a late Penitent from the time of his Conversion.

It will be more beneficial to consider how many Souls have miscarried upon this account, than to trust to it.

While they have adjourned the Session of their Thoughts *for examining their Ways*, Death hath often interposed, and called them to another Inquiry, before they had begun their own : While they have hovered in suspence between their Resolves and the execution of them ; like St. Paul in his *straight* between Life and Death, the *fatal Night wherein no man can work*, hath put a stop to their Proceedings, and shut them up in endless Darkness. And thus they have become like one who falls hastily to his Meat, with design to crave a Blef-

a Blessing after he is filled, but is choaked with the first Morsel, for a punishment of his neglect. But we must not think to deal with our Lives, at *Tully* did with his Orations, and leave that part to the last, which should first employ our Thoughts, for it will be with different success; and though he received Applause, we shall incur a Check. Let it then be our Wisdom, *to know in our present day, the things belonging to our peace,* lest they be hidden from our Eyes before the next. Let us think upon our Ways while we are young, and we shall have the less to do when we are old. And all such young Men who shall conscientiously set about the practice of this great and necessary Duty, shall find the Word of God declaring his Approbation of their Doings; and that their being thus *sober minded,* in thinking early *on their ways,* will be more their Glory, than all their Strength and Vigour.

But if this Employment is so much the Business and the Ornament of Youth, it is more requisite and becoming in Age. If the uncertainty of living should hasten young Men to perform it; the certainty of dying soon, should oblige the old not to defer it. Their having been long Travellers in the way of all the Earth, gives

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132 *Thoughts well Employ'd : Or,*

them reason to believe they are near their Journeys end. The untilling of the Roofs, the decay of the Windows, the failure of the Pillars, and the general impairing of the Fabricks of their Bodies, are sad Prognosticks of their speedy fall ; and sure it will be high time to provide other Habitations for their Souls against their earthly Tabernacles are dissolved ; high time to think in what Way they are going, because if not quickly done, they will be past the advantage of it, and lose the Opportunity of reforming their Errour, if they find they have gone wrong.

Besides, their Parts have been long upon the Theatre of this World, and they have more to think upon, than those who made their *Exit* sooner, which makes it a greater Task to look so far behind them, to their first entrance, and think considerately on all the Excellencies or Miscarriages in their Action all the while, wherefore they must begin this Business quickly, lest they should want leisure to dispatch it; and the rather, because this is probably the time of their own prefixing for this Work ; for either they resolved never to think upon their ways, or to do it now at least : and indeed now their Hindrances are not so great or many as in their youth ; the weakness

*ness of the flesh* betrayed them then to sin, but now with-holds them from it; the Vanities of the World, have now lost their alluring Charms; so that nothing but the third Enemy of Mankind, the Devil, can dissuade them from this excellent Employment, and even he hath not so much to work upon, nor can lay so many Baits as formerly, to withdraw and divert them from it.

Since *Man at his best estate is altogether vanity*, and the whole course of his life *is walking in a vain shadow*, should he not desire to *know how frail he is?* Should he not consider his many Failings and Deviations, and whether he hath already begg'd God's pardon for them, and reformed his Errors, or hath it yet to do? If he hath already dispatched that Business, with what Complacency and Satisfaction will he review the History of his Life; when either he finds no *Act* of his upon that Record, which can justly bring a Blush into his Face, and observes no Day of his Life that he could wish forgotten, but takes as much delight in reflecting on his past-time, as he did in spending it, or where he had committed any Faults, sees the Pages wherein they were registered, blotted over, and no remembrance of them preserved

to his disadvantage ; will it not be time well spent in so satisfactory an Employment of his Thoughts ? Or if he finds his old Iniquities still chronicled, the stains not washed away with penitential Tears, nor the Score wiped off by God's forgiving Hand ; will not this remembrance of his Ways make him ashamed , and fill him with Confusion? Will it not send him immediately to the *Throne of Grace* to sue his Pardon out, and never let him be at peace within himself , till God is pacified towards him for all that he hath done : And sure the guilt which was the busines of many years to contract, will cost some time and labour in its removal, and he who hath at most but a few minutes left to perfect that mighty work, ought not to mispend a moment, but husband well the poor remainder of his days, which is the All he hath to trust to, and while he enjoys a Being upon earth, employ it in the pursuit of a better life in Heaven. He shou'd trim his lamp while it is burning, that if it be possible, what hath hitherto cast but a dim and languid light, may expire in a glorious blaze.

And if it hath not been his care to have lived well in his youth, he must be the more judicious to amend his life, that he may dye

dye well in his Age ; and that at last by following the righteous in their ways, he may overtake them, in a resemblance of their latter end. It is not for us to persist in our negligence, because we have slipt the fairest season ; but we must rather redeem the time by greater industry, that tho' we go forth weeping for our lost opportunities ; yet if we sow good seed in the residue of our days, we may return with joy, and bring our sheaves with us.

Nor shou'd the oldest non-proficient of us be ashamed to begin to learn this Duty in his age, unless because he did not earlier apply himself to the task ; but if he hath not practised it from his youth up, he will find the greater reason to be studious in it, when he is old. Since *the hoary head is a Crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.* But for those who are men in years to be *babes in Christ,* and (when for their time, they ought to be Teachers) to have need of being taught, this is an ignorance, than which nothing can be more unpardonable, but the persevering in it ; for *shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction, but he is in the way of life that keepeth it :* and therefore we must make haste to take fast hold of it, before our flesh and bodies are

K 4                          consumed,

136 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,  
*consumed, let we mourn at last for the omission.*

So far are we from having occasion to seek refuge in excuses for our late beginning to addict our selves to this excellent employment of thinking on our ways, that it wou'd be inexcusable to defer it longer.

The man who hath spent most of his days in folly and extravagance, if at last he grows serious and reserved, hath no reason to blush at his coming to himself, but at his being so long insensible. Such a folly and madness is a course of sin, and if by a serious reflection on our selves, and a manifestation given us, by the *true light*, of the reproveable impertinencies in which we are engaged, we *awake out of our sleep*, and *arise from the dead*; that is, forsake our sinful ways, and put away the evil of our doings; nothing will be liable to objection in our amendment, but it's not bearing a more ancient date.

But at what time a sinner thinks upon his ways, and turns his feet unto God's testimonies, there is a Jubilee in Heaven, and the farther he is gone in a wrong course, and the more likely to be irreclaimable, the more abundant is the Joy: and God's extraordinary satisfaction to find a *Son that was lost*, will obliterate the remembrance

membrance of his undutiful departure. The Prodigal was young when he left his father's house, but he had consumed much of his time as well as substance in living from it, and yet he was not discouraged in his age, to return to that place which the folly of his youth had tempted him to forsake ; but as soon as ever he came to himself, he put on resolutions to go home, and we find he was not upbraided for his late submission, but the extravagancies of his youth rendred it more acceptable. To conclude this point, since *the days of old men are but few*, and their weaknesses have been great and many, let them endeavour to recover strength before they go hence, and are no more.

Now that neither young nor old may be hindred in the right performance of their Duty in thinking on their ways, let us, if we can, make a discovery of those obstacles and impediments that divert our thoughts from that employment : and so we shall be the better able to remove them, and we shall find we are hindred partly through these following means.

First, through unworthy constructions and improvements of God's patience and forbearance, whose great design and end is to encourage us to this duty, and to lead us

138. *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

*as to repentance; but the wicked make not such a profitable use and happy advantage of it, but because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore their heart is fully set to do evil.* Because the Atheist blasphemeth Heaven, and is not blasted with its Lightning; because the Swearer takes God's Name in vain, and is not immediately struck dumb; because the Drunkard is not indeed turned into a beast, for making himself like one, in his excess; because the Adulterer does not always find a Phineas to stab him in the midst of his unchaste embraces; hence it is that men become so bold in sinning, and so daring, or at least so inconsiderate and foolish, that they dally with damnation, and play upon the mouth of Hell, as fearless as the sucking child on the hole of the Asp, and the weaned child on the Cocatrice den, as if they shou'd not hurt nor destroy in the ways of sin, any more than in the holy mountain. And while they live as if there was not a God, and do not find his Vengeance in the punishment of their impieties, they are confirmed in a disbelief of his Existence. But if while we are boasting of our selves, and glorying in our abilities, while our hearts are lifted up, and our minds hardened in pride; we shou'd like the

King

King of *Babylon*, be checked by a Voice from Heaven, and turned to feed among beasts; if when we provoke God, the Earth shou'd swallow us up, as persons unworthy to live upon it; such Judgments wou'd teach others caution, and they wou'd no longer be *high-minded*, but *fear*, they wou'd not venture upon sin, when they found it the way to ruine, and that by indulging it, they made court to their own destruction. But because God is *slow to anger*, and of *great compassion*, they are ready to demand, *Who is the Lord, that they shou'd obey his voice.* Because he doth not willingly afflict the children of men, therefore they think he doth not see, and that there is no knowledge in the most High.

We find his silence made the wicked conclude him an Accomplice with them, and fansie him *such a one as themselves*, and because he deferred his coming, there were *Scoffers* that asked, *Where is the promise of it?* Because in the administrations of his wrath he remembers mercy, and makes many pauses, because he whets his sword, and bends his bow, and makes ready his arrows, and bestows so much time in preparing the instruments of death, we are apt to flatter our selves, that he is not in earnest, and hath no design to use them. But if we had

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140 .*Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

the least mixture of ingenuity in the temper of our Souls, we shou'd fly to the embraces of those arms which have been so long stretched forth, and not put that patience to a farther tryal, whereof we have had such repeated proofs. God forbid we shou'd incline to so accursed and dangerous a Principle, as to *continue in sin*, that *Grace may abound*, for if we refuse when he calls, and regard not when he stretches out his hand; he will execute his fierce wrath upon us, and laugh at our calamity under it.

A second thing that obstructs our thinking on our ways is, because we find some difficulty and trouble in reforming them. The pains of resisting Satan, and grappling with Corruption, are harsh and disagreeable to flesh and blood. When we are enjoined to *mortifie our earthly members*, to subdue our lusts and passions, we think the Command no less severe than that for *Abraham* to sacrifice his Son, and have not so near a relation to him, that we can undertake it with his readiness; when we come to *shew our faith by our works*, it scarce appears equal to a *grain of mustard seed*. To be *sober and vigilant*, that we be not devoured; to *watch and pray*, that we enter not into temptation; to keep a guard upon our thoughts, our words, and actions, that they do

do not go astray, or offend in anything; seems a task so toilsome and laborious, that we soon grow tired of the employment, become remiss and careless in it, and cry with the Jews, *behold what a Weariness it is?* Mal. 1. 13. and for this reason, instead of a *pure offering* which God requires, we *sacrifice corrupt things to him, the torn, the lame and the sick*, which instead of finding acceptance, bring a curse upon us. The strictness and severity of a Christian life, is the *Lyon in our way*, that hinders our proficiency in it; we cannot confine our selves to the restraints it lays upon us, nor comply with the mortifications it enjoins; we look on it as a *Toke*, without considering its *easiness*, and we cannot bear it, though light, because it is a *burden*. The thorny rugged path to Heaven offends and galls our feet, and we will not advance a step towards it, unless we may have liberty to pass through the delightful ways of an Earthly Paradise. *Fasting* is an unpleasant entertainment to those, who have used themselves to *fare deliciously every day*; and a garment of *Camels hair* would but ill agree with the softness and effeminacy of those who have known nothing courser than *purple and fine linnen*; so that, we go on without interruption, in a sensual course of life. And while

while we dare not think upon our ways, to reform them for the future, we are more afraid to think upon them, to repent of what is past. For there we find nothing but a melancholy, hideous prospect, that fills us with anxiety and terrour; to be rid of which, we dismiss our thoughts from that employment, and betake our selves to our merry inconsiderate life again, to divert our minds from the remembrance of what so much disturbed them. But why shou'd we look so much at the hardships in our way, as not to mind the pleasures at our journey's end? Why should we be more terrified with the difficulties and hazards of the Combate, than encouraged by the Triumphs that attend the Victory? If we look to *the Joy* and *the Crown* designed for our Reward, we shall not be weary nor faint in our minds, nor fall under the Ephraimites disgrace of turning our selves back in the day of battel. We shall then fight, not as those that beat the air; and run, not as uncertainly; but keep under our bodies, and bring them into subjection, which will be the only way to make them and our Souls too, free indeed. And when the sense of the acute pains, and extream throes in travail, nay the very remembrance of them too, is lost in the satisfaction that a man child.

*child is born into the world ; shall not the contemplation of our being born again to an inheritance in Heaven, enable us to go chearfully through all that is uneasie and pungent in our regeneration.*

And we have the assistance of these two Considerations towards the work.

First, That the enemies with whom we are to engage, cannot give us any long disturbance. Our death will free us from all their attempts, and the disquietudes they occasion. Our sins shall be buried in our Graves, beyond the hope of a Resurrection. Whereas we shall rise from thence as clear from the spots and scars of that nauseous Leprosie, as *Naaman* was after his ascent from *Jordan*. Then we shall have no more rebellious passions to subdue, no more unruly lusts to curb ; no more obdurate hearts to vex us, no more unreasonable appetites to distract us, but having obtained a total victory, nay being *more than conquerours*, we shall be *at perfect peace*.

For with our flesh we shall put off all the failings and infirmities of it, that pre-disposed matter, which was so easily wrought on to our prejudice ; and drop our earthly inclinations, as *Elijah* did his mantle, when we are translated from this world. And whatever hath been trou-  
blesom

blesom to us, and an impediment to our pilgrimage in this life, shall not retard our journey to the next, nor interrupt our pleasures there: for whatever defileth, or worketh abomination, shall in no wise enter into our possession, the City of the living God. Let this thought therefore strengthen and inspirit us, to undertake the Combate resolutely, and to fight under our Saviour's Banner with the chearfulness and bravery of those Souldiers who perceive Victory declaring in their favour, and their enemies preparing for a speedy flight, and disabled for evermore to take the field against them.

Secondly, Let us consider, that it is more advantageous, as well as more honorable, to fight with courage now, where the Battel will not continue long, than to be condemned to everlasting Torments for our Cowardise, and have *them that hate us made Lords over us*. 'Tis better to enter into life *halt and maimed*, than having every part and member whole and unhurt, to be sentenced to eternal death: for this dismal punishment is decreed for those, who not regarding the illustrious Original of their Souls, meanly condescend to encrease the Devil's triumph by yielding themselves his Captives. Is it not better then to strive and take

take some pains in giving a repulse to his assaults, than by tame submissions to become sharers in his condemnation? Is it not our interest to encounter him here, though we are sometimes bruised and wounded in the unequal congress, rather than let him carry us to that perdition to which he is sentenced irrecoverably? The world hath not wanted instances of men who have chosen an honourable death before an ignominious life; who amidst their Tortures would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And shall not we, being compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses, who have led the way, follow their great Example, and wax valiant in this fight, since we know we shall turn to flight the armies of the Aliens? Have not we reason to prefer the toil and hazard of such a Conflict, before a life more intolerable than death in all its terrors? But why shou'd we apprehend the hardships of this spiritual Warfare, which will vanish by degrees, and as they grow more familiar, become less formidable? The Soldier by frequent use of Armour, grows insensible of its weight, that galled and wearied him at first; and tedious Marches, hungry meals, short sleep, and sudden Alarms, which once fatigued and harassed him, are at last his diversion, and he cannot live

146 *Thoughts well Employ'd*: Or,  
aid of a Camp, who once thought it death  
to continue in it. We think it now a Her-  
culean labour to deliberate on every action,  
to inquire into every thought; and to ex-  
amine every word; to question all our mo-  
tions, whence they come, and to what end  
they tend; before we sign their Passport;  
but if we will once try (and the Experi-  
ment is safe and harmless) we shall find  
there is not any sensual pleasure compara-  
ble to those sublimated Joys the Soul ex-  
tracts from the knowledge of its sincere en-  
deavours to recommend it self to God, by  
obedience to his Will. And nothing is  
more necessary and conducive to this work,  
than to employ the reflex and direct acts of  
our Souls in thinking on our ways: that we  
may discover our past evours, and through  
a just sense and abhorrence of them, avoid  
all future wanderings. For if we do not  
think upon our ways, we shall live at ran-  
dom, and run into a Labyrinth of Absur-  
dities; and pursue our own destruction:  
from which nothing can deliver us: but  
y<sup>e</sup> illus<sup>t</sup>he result of this Employment of  
thought is, The turning our feet unto God's<sup>s</sup>  
instruments, his calling into action to  
excite and forward better performance of this  
duty. Let us consider what it is to turn our  
severing from God's Testimonies, unto that w<sup>e</sup>  
evil Asmode. Scatter Warnings have couched  
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our life and conversation under the Metaphor of a Way, so they comprehend our appetites, inclinations, affections under that of Feet, they having in the performance of our actions the same office that feet bear in the motion of our bodies, and carry us forward in all our ways. Thus the Prophet in the description of the wickedness of *Israel*, gives it for one part of their Character, that *their feet were swift to shed blood*.

That is, their desires and inclinations had an eager bent to Murders, and that saying of the Spouse, *I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?* Cant. 5. 31 amplifies her having cleansed and purified her affections, after which they ought not to be again sullied and polluted, by any inclination to impiety. Now the Testimonies of God are his Commandments, those holy Sanctions that have informed us what is good and agreeable to him, and what wicked and displeasing, and enjoined us obedience to his Will in the practice of the one, and a total abstinence from the other, adding promises of large rewards to encourage us in the performance of our Duty, and threatenings of severe punishments to deter us from neglecting it. Thus the Law which Moses set before the Children of *Israel*, is called *the Testimonies, and the Statutes, and the Judgments which he spake unto*

148 *Thoughts well Employ'd: Or,*

unto them; *Deut. 4. 42.* And in David's charge to Solomon on his death-bed, the first and principal injunction is, *Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways; to keep his Statutes and his Commandments, and his Judgments, and his Testimonies;* as it is written in the Law of Moses, that thou mayst prosper in all thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thy self, *1 Kings 2. 3.* From all which we shall perceive, that by turning our feet unto God's Testimonies, is meant;

First, Our examining and judging of our ways by comparing them with God's Commandments.

Secondly, Our amending them, by making them conformable to those directions; the word *Turning* being expressive of both these notions. And indeed if we turn, as God commands us, to the Law and to the Testimony, we shall find it a light unto our feet, and a lantern to our paths, in each of these respects: for the Commandment is a lamp, and the Law a light, directing us to the knowledge and discovery of Sin. By the help of this instruction, we shall think effectually on our ways, we shall see how exactly we have walked by the rule of life prescribed us, or wherein we have swerved and varied from it. His Testimonies will be Evidences of his pleasure and our obedience;

obedience : they will shew us whether we have walked Godly, righteously and soberly in this present world, in respect of him, our neighbour, and our selves , or have broke loose from the restraints, and over-leaped the fences of Religion, in impiety , injustice, or intemperance. And if we turn our feet unto God's Testimonies in this sense ; we shall quickly turn them in the other. We shall make haste and not delay to keep his Commandments, that is, to pay an entire obedience to them for the future in doing all that they require, and abstaining from whatever they forbid.

Now in this turning consists the whole work and busines of repentance unto Salvation , such a repentance as will need no repenting of : for this includes Aversion and Conversion , the necessary qualifications of it ; for Repentance (as the Original word imports) is a change of mind for the better, such a change as prevails upon the actions to accompany it , for the Greek Verb signifies to be wise after the commission of an error , upon due reflection and serious thinking on our ways, as David declares he was. We know repentance hath properly its operation, where there hath been the habit of some sin, and in a mind, if not wholly, yet in some sort averse to Vertue and Religion, insomuch that it doth.

not apply it self to the practice of it, nor exert it in any action; but on the contrary, rather gives it self up to be governed by appetite, and to follow its own inventions. Now when we think upon our ways, and the reflection represents to our minds the evil of such doings, and takes off the affection and tendency we had to them, making us put on resolutions to forsake them; this is properly a turning from them; and the Psalmist means it as one part of the result and consequence of his thinking on his ways; that he turned his feet from the evil of them. This is the term from whence we are to begin our progress in the ways of Godliness, *the considering and turning away from all the transgressions that we have committed*, Ezek. 18.28. But then there must be the term to which we are to move our repentance from dead works, must terminate in serving the living God, and make his testimonies our delight and our Counsellors to direct our ways.

And when we are in this good and right way to Salvation, we must go vigorously on; for if we once stand still, it will be *in the way of sinners*, and we shall quickly go astray again among those whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths. Nor may we at all look back upon our former ways, as Lot's Wife did on Sodom, with a fondness

fondness and kind remembrance of them, with concern and reluctaney for quitting them; for this will be an argument that we are not truly turned unto God's Testimonies; and if our thoughts and affections are not in a direct Act, looking towards them, our Lord will no more receive us than the Samaritans wou'd our Saviour, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

The Word and Law of God is the Rule that must guide our ways, if we desire to walk humbly and acceptably with him; he hath shew[n] us in it what is good, and revealed his whole counsel to us. And if we have respect unto these his ways, in the guidance and direction of our own, we shall be sure not to be mistaken in them. For the Law of the Lord is perfect converting the Soul, and his Testimony is sure, making wise the simple. The keeping his Precepts made David wiser than the aged, and gave him more understanding than his Teachers. And his Statutes most needs rejoice our hearts to see our selves in such a certain way to Happiness, when his Commandments have enlightened our eyes to find it. And if we wou'd be acquainted with all, even our secret faults; and keep back from the dominion of presumptuous sins, and live innocent from the great Transgressions; from the Testimonies

152 *Thoughts well Employ'd: &c.*

nies of our God we shall receive these benefits, we shall be warned by them from our iniquities, and in keeping them we shall find great reward.

But because the way of man is not of himself, neither is it in him to direct his steps, but his goings are of the Lord. We may very well put the question, *How can a man then understand his own way?* Prov. 20. 24. But the Answer is as ready, that it must be by applying himself to him that giveth wisdom, and out of whose mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. Prov. 2. 6. for the preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord, and he will direct his work in truth.

Let us beseech him therefore who knoweth all our thoughts, so to direct and guide them in the knowledge and discovery of our ways, that no past evil in them, may escape our observation and repentance; and that no inadvertency or neglect may suffer them to be corrupted by future errors; but that he will please so to order our paths by the influence of his holy Word and Spirit, that he may delight in our ways, and we obtain salvation by them through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Felix Nois.*

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242

